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VENETIA'S LOVERS



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VENETIA'S LOVERS.

I.

MRS. BRIMBLE was not a person whom it was easy to get rid of; she was apt to remain when once she had gained a footing.

She breakfasted in bed next morning, and announced that as Maria had not sent her a gown to replace the satin flounces—not to speak of a bonnet—she would stay till evening, as she couldn't be seen going through the streets in daylight with a cap on her head.

Dinah hoped that her gownless condition would serve to confine her for the

day to the limits of the blue bedroom ; but Mrs. Brimble had no fancy for solitude ; she ordered Parker the maid into her presence, and was not at all abashed before her prim displeasure ; she passed Mrs. Murray's wardrobe in review till she found a dress that she consented to wear till her own arrived.

Dinah met Parker looking sorely aggrieved, and Mrs. Murray patiently good-natured, carrying detachments of the latter's wardrobe into the blue bedroom for inspection ; Mrs. Brimble, sitting up in bed, caught a glimpse of the help through the open door, and commanded her to come and assist at the decision.

"Dinah Kenyon," she said, when she had at last grumbled herself into one of the dresses, "you go and fetch me a little shawl to cover the place where the buttons don't meet ; it must be a little shawl, do

you hear ? for a big shawl is what I won't wear—as if I was an old dowdy. It's all your dressmaker's fault, Mary Murray, for, as anybody can see, you're stouter than me."

"You'd better have another cap too," Dinah suggested, looking doubtfully at the summer garden, and wondering if Mrs. Brimble had slept in it. But Mrs. Brimble declined quite crossly.

"Our Jack brought it from Paris," she said ; "and, Mary Murray, you haven't one that can come near it."

At last, at last, the toilet was finished, and Mrs. Brimble stumped downstairs on the flat velvet boots, with Dinah in her train.

The big drawing-room still had traces of the late merry-making, and the servants were carrying off the red benches, and the pots of flagging flowers ; the end of a feast

has always a funereal suggestion, and this quick dispersion of the relics had something of a burial sadness to Dinah. She stooped and picked up a silver thistle from the floor, and hid it jealously in the breast of her dress, fearful of any questions.

Mrs. Brimble, having walked round the room on a tour of inspection, obstinately refused to leave it; she would stay, she said, and see that Mary Murray's servants did their duty, and she would be in the way if any visitors came. She established herself in an arm-chair under the chandelier, where she could command all points of the room at once, just on the spot where Fanny had grouped Dinah last night—was it only last night?—with Lord Heatherleigh. This association of ideas seemed to occur to Mrs. Brimble also, for as Dinah was stooping to place a footstool

under the velvet boots she said, in her most incisive manner :

“ If that old lord calls to-day he's to be shown into this room, do you hear, Dinah Kenyon ? I know what's what, if Mary Murray doesn't, and it's not for gels like you that noble lords come to call. So it's in here he's to be shown, where Mary Murray and me can receive him, as a lord should be received.”

Dinah promised readily ; she would have promised anything at that moment to secure her escape. She flew to the library, opening the door half timidly, but her heart fell when she entered, for the room was empty. She crossed it and rang the bell ; then she remembered that the servants were busy, and she ran to the breakfast-room where she found a maid carrying away the empty cups and dishes.

"Where is Mr. Fraser?" she asked quickly.

"He went out quite early, miss. He said he didn't want any breakfast, but Jane and me was having our coffee, and I brought him a cup in here."

"Thank you, Jessie," said Dinah, with whom this smiling maid was a favourite; "he didn't say how long he would be gone?"

"No, miss, he didn't say."

Dinah went back to the library. Dick's papers were undisturbed; she was sure he had not been at his desk that morning, because the charitable reports and the blue correspondence of the agent who wanted ferrets lay scattered about just as she had dusted them yesterday. There was a missionary magazine illustrated on the title-page with the portrait of a negro, whom Dick in a light-hearted moment of

idleness had tricked out with a cavalier's hat and plumes. Dinah laughed as she noticed it—then she suddenly thrust the paper into the waste-basket. Dick might not be quite so light-hearted when his eyes next fell on it. She drew out her duster from under the sofa-cushion and began to put the writing-table in order ; it somehow seemed as if it might hasten Dick's return to set all things ready for him, and she longed and yet dreaded to see Dick again. As she was whisking the blue rag about she suddenly lit on a little scrap of paper addressed to herself ; she opened it eagerly.

“DEAR DINAH,” it said, “As I don't feel quite up to work to-day, I'm going for a long stretch into the country. Only one day, Dinah ; to-night I will come back, and take up the old round again, and things will be as they were before. My love to Mrs. Murray. DICK.”

A hot tear splashed down on the ragged scrap of paper. Things could never, never again be as they were before. When the web of life has been roughly torn, you can't patch up the place as if there had been no rent. Oh, Dick, poor Dick; it was not you she loved after all!

Mrs. Murray came in while Dinah still stood by the table; the good soul was smiling happily, for she had just had a successful interview with the cook, who was not "put out," as cooks claim a sacred right to be after a party. Mrs. Murray was always a trifle afraid of her servants, and she was pleased that cook was pleased, but at sight of Dinah's face her own sobered.

"Do you think she will stay all day, my dear?" she asked a little anxiously, her mind at once reverting to her guest.

"Who? Mrs. Brimble? Oh, it isn't to be thought of; if the gown, the only gown in which she can drive through London, doesn't come this morning, we'll send Parker for it in the carriage after lunch. Maria and Emily will not be able to withstand the carriage; they will bring the entire contents of the wardrobe themselves. But you, my dear," she smiled into the kind face, "I'm afraid you must offer yourself up a sacrifice till after lunch, for Mrs. Brimble is sitting in state under the chandelier to scold you."

"She was always fond of hearing herself speak, but that's nothing. Dear me, it's easy to listen. But I'm afraid she's frightened Dick away."

"It is not Mrs. Brimble who keeps Dick away."

They looked at each other, and the smile died from Mrs. Murray's face.

"Do you know anything about Mr. Challice, Dinah?" she asked uneasily.

"Nothing but what you know. Nothing but what all the world could see last night."

"Dinah," Mrs. Murray whispered, as if afraid of the sound of her own words, "do you think you are right? I hope not; I hope not, with all my heart. A quarrel, my dear; young people often fall out just for the pleasure of making it up again." Then as she read the hopelessness in Dinah's face; "It will break Dick's heart," she said.

Dinah shook her head.

"Hearts are not so easily broken, and pain doesn't last for ever any more than pleasure. They say people never marry their first love, and sometimes not their second either. I suppose we ought to feel quite comfortable when we have assured

each other that he will get over it, but he won't, he won't, he won't; and what's the use of saying anything at all! I'll tell you what," she went on swiftly, "he's coming back to-night, and Mrs. Brimble must be got rid of if it should take all our clothes to do it."

Mrs. Brimble could no longer be taken humorously. She was a dreadful fact to Dinah, who spent the whole of the morning in propitiating her, and in flying on her errands. Dinah remembered that description of the horse-leech whose cry is, "Give, give," as she brought books, albums, scent-bottles, foot-warmers, perfume. Any one belonging to Mrs. Brimble would require to be furnished by nature with at least six pairs of legs and two backs; she seemed to invent a new want every five minutes as a salutary discipline for the lady-help. Dinah, in the course of her

many journeys and her flights up and down stairs, grew to feel a sincere pity for Maria and Emily and even for "Our Jack"; every time she came back from the blue bedroom, or the dining-room, or the library, she thought Mrs. Brimble, as she sat enthroned under the dropping crystals of the chandelier more and more resembled an ancient heathen goddess, with an inappeasable appetite for offerings; she felt quite a warm glow about her heart when any of her little sacrifices were accepted.

It is, after all, the tyrannical and overbearing who best awaken our gratitude; their sparing amiability is such a charming surprise.

Lunch-time came and passed without the arrival of the gown, and Mrs. Brimble, warmed and fed, began to hint that it might be as well to postpone her home-going till to-morrow, "for the gels would

never forgive me for wearing your gown, Mary Murray, and it not meeting at the waist for all you're so much stouter than me."

Dinah was sincerely alarmed at this new turn of affairs, for she was privately convinced by this time that if Maria did arrive with the dress she was certain to have forgotten the bonnet; it was clearly Maria's understood duty to forget something, and there seemed no resource left but to hire a van and bring Mrs. Brimble's whole wardrobe to Bayswater.

While she was considering how best to undermine this little plot of Maria's and Maria's mamma, she heard the bell ring, and her spirits rose in the hope that it might be Lord Heatherleigh who made this appeal. Never before had she so ardently longed for somebody to call—the more aristocratic and exclusive a somebody

the better — nothing under a nobleman would satisfy Mrs. Brimble, and Dinah set her desires on the one earl of her acquaintance.

It was not Lord Heatherleigh, but it was Mr. Papillon, and though she would rather it had been any one else, he was better than no one, and she cheerfully offered him up at the shrine of the goddess, all the more cheerfully because he so evidently wanted to talk to herself.

Mr. Papillon wore a Norfolk jacket and a Byronic collar, and you could have felt certain to look at him that there was a Spanish sombrero lying on the hall table ; it was impossible to associate his Apollo curls with anything so prosaic as a chimney-pot hat.

Dinah took a quite malicious delight in seeing him chained to the group under the chandelier ; Mrs. Murray made room for

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him in front of the arm-chair and footstool ; he looked a little like a culprit about to be judged, and he cast reproachful glances at the young girl hovering near and yet not near enough to join in the talk. Mrs. Brimble, for that matter, did all the talking. Mr. Papillon had a distinct place in her mind, as the young man who got a thousand a year for being gentlemanly, and she let him see she thought it a very poor trade.

“ Mr. Papillon writes beautiful poetry,” said Mrs. Murray, coming to his rescue, “ Dinah has read some of it to me.”

Dinah walked quickly to the other end of the room.

“ Poetry ?” said Mrs. Brimble with contempt, “ who wants poetry ! If you take my advice, young man, you’ll start in the useful line. Clothes, now, or food ; people must eat and they must dress ” — she

glanced down at her own raiment—"though some folks, I must say, are easily contented."

"Some people think that they must also read," said the poet loftily.

Dinah came back at the sound of her own name; Mr. Papillon looked melancholy and bored.

"Miss Kenyon," he said, "I came with a message from your sister; she is going to drive Lord Heatherleigh, and she sent to ask if you would join the party."

"Oh, I can't to-day," she said quickly. Then she looked at Mrs. Brimble, and she read something in that lady's face that seemed to amuse her, for she laughed. "If Fanny had been going northwards," she said carelessly, "she and Lord Heatherleigh might have taken Mrs. Brimble home. Mrs. Brimble is very anxious to get home, and Miss Maria has unaccountably for-

gotten to send for her. You will take a message to Fanny, Mr. Papillon? She will be dreadfully cross, because she must want another lady or she wouldn't have sent for me. Wait a minute! I have it. Mrs. Murray will go, won't you, dear? and I'll entertain Mrs. Brimble till Miss Maria comes. That will appease Fanny."

Mrs. Murray looked doubtful and Mr. Papillon moody, but Mrs. Brimble rose with an admirable air of decision.

"I will go," she said. "It's not right that a young woman like your sister should go driving about alone with lords. And I told her I would call on her. You heard me, Mary Murray," she said with daring unvaracity, "you heard me say last night that I would call?"

"But your dress?" said Mrs. Murray, faintly, with a glance at the little shawl that hid the reluctant buttons.

"And your bonnet?" Dinah added promptly; "you can't go driving with even a Paris cap."

Mrs. Brimble looked darkly at Dinah as if she read the lurking laughter in her eyes, but she turned to Mrs. Murray with an air of prompt resource and heroic resolve.

"I'll take the loan of your black silk; it's badly cut, but it will do for once. And your bonnet with the yellow feather; it's not my shape or colour, but that young woman can't go driving about alone with lords. Dinah Kenyon, you may wrap my cap in silver paper when I'm gone, and I'll come to fetch it to-morrow."

Dinah laughed out loud when the ladies had left the room to make this change of toilet, but Mr. Papillon seemed to find her merriment jarring.

"When I promised to explore the un-

discovered country with you, Miss Kenyon, I did not undertake to——”

“To escort one of the natives westwards? But I have thought of your feelings, Mr. Papillon; I have sent for a cab.”

“Your sister will hardly appreciate the sacrifice this lady is making for her. She will be infinitely bored—and shocked.”

“Fanny has bored so many people in her life that it's but fair she should take her turn in suffering. And it is Lord Heatherleigh who will be shocked. Oh,” cried Dinah, with dancing eyes, “how I wish I could be there to see it all!”

“Then come!” Mr. Papillon's voice lost some of its moodiness.

“Can't, there wouldn't be room; a lord takes a whole side to himself. But whatever you do, Mr. Papillon, whatever you do, don't let her come back.”

“I would do a great deal for you.”

“Oh, but you will enjoy Islington,” she said quickly. “I daresay you have never been there before, and you will feel like an explorer. And if you should see Miss Maria you may tell her not to trouble about the cap or the velvet boots. I will send everything home at once, so that Mrs. Brimble need not come to fetch them.”

When that ill-assorted pair—the yellow feather and the Norfolk jacket—had gone away together, the two ladies embraced each other in their relief.

“What will your sister say?” Mrs. Murray asked anxiously.

“Oh, Mr. Papillon will explain,” Dinah answered lightly; “and a plunge into the real will do them no harm. If Fanny keeps huffy I will buy her the ugliest bit of pottery I can find, and that will make it all right.”

But they did not feel safe till after

dinner, and every ring at the bell set their hearts beating. After dinner it was Dick for whose ring they listened ; any moment might bring him, and how would he come back to them ? Dinah sat on a low stool at Mrs. Murray's feet, and they waited in a silence to which each set many sorrowful thoughts.

"If you could have slipped round to see Venice," Mrs. Murray whispered ; but Dinah shrank away from the suggestion.

"I couldn't. She did not mean to be cruel, but I might say something for which I should never forgive myself."

She was thinking somewhat hardly of Venice, and more than hardly of the man who had won her from Dick. Venice did not look happy last night, but that might be because of the trouble in Dick's face. To-day, compunction would have passed and she would be content with her lover.

She would have forgotten the boy who had cared only for her all these years. It is a hard necessity of this imperfect life of ours that so much of our happiness must be grasped across another's pain ; our joy-bells are too often the death-knell to some poor quivering heart. Dinah felt the world grow very large and cold about her as she thought of Venice rejoicing while Dick sorrowed, and her own helplessness gave her a kind of shock. Her impotence was a pain to her ; she could only stand aside and look on, for Dick must bear his burden alone.

If Dinah had been older she could have looked beyond the crisis and seen the sun shine again upon the coming days, but she was young, and with youth there is only the present, there is no future.

She started up presently. "It is very late," she said. "Don't you think we

might let the servants go to bed, and you or I could let Dick in when he comes?"

Mrs. Murray assented, and Dinah gave the order. When the house was quite quiet and the lights out she stole away to the pantry and came back laden with plates and dishes.

"I've made a raid on the larder," she said, more cheerful since she had found something to do, "and you must make my peace with cook to-morrow. By good luck there's one of Dick's favourite pies. He ought to be hungry, and anyhow you must coax him to eat. Couldn't you pretend to an appetite yourself?"

"I don't know that it would be all pretence." Mrs. Murray turned round in her chair to watch Dinah spread the supper. "I don't believe I ate any dinner."

"It's Mrs. Brimble; she leaves you an

appetite by taking it away all the time she stays."

"She hasn't come back." Mrs. Murray sighed with content.

"I never thought I should feel so kindly to an earl," the help answered with a laugh as she flanked the pie with a ham.

But after all, very late, when they heard Dick turn the key in the latch, Dinah's courage failed her.

"You go," she said to Mrs. Murray, giving her a gentle push, and when the good woman went with motherly trouble in her heart to meet poor Dick, Dinah fled and did not stop till she had locked herself safely in her own room.

II.

SHE came down next morning full of trepidation : she wished she had stayed up last night, it seemed so much worse to meet Dick by light of day : she shrank from him as we shrink from suffering that we have no power to relieve.

“ I helped to make his sorrow,” she said, “ and I can do nothing to make it easier.”

But when at last she opened the library door it seemed to be almost the same Dick who looked up from his desk and nodded good-morning to her. If he felt that he had died over night and suffered a resurrection into a new world, he only showed it by a harder line about his mouth and by

an increasing diligence. This unceasing application—for Dick scribbled as if all the charities in London were clamorous for his replies—and his silence almost frightened Dinah, and she was thankful when he said without looking up, "Have you come to dust?" and so gave her a motive and excuse for being busy too. She hung over the books at the other end of the room wondering how long she might with decency linger near them, and whether Dick would notice if she skipped whisking at the charitable reports altogether; or whether, if she approached his table, Dick would put down his pen and speak.

She was afraid of his silence and afraid of his confidence. While she was debating these things the door opened to admit Mrs. Murray. Dinah had been the delinquent this morning and had breakfasted alone, and as she turned to greet her friend

she noticed immediately that something had happened. Mrs. Murray's pink cap-strings were for once too jaunty for the sober looks they framed. Dinah settled quickly that something much worse than Mrs. Brimble's return with the borrowed black silk and yellow bonnet had driven the smiles from that kind face. Mrs. Murray held an open letter in her hand, and she went straight across the room to the desk where Dick sat writing as if for dear life ; she paused a little behind him and laid her hand on his shoulder.

" Dick, my dear," she said with great gravity, " I want you to write a note for me."

" Yes, certainly," said Dick, pushing aside his papers with a show of alacrity and speaking fast ; " you haven't decided to invest in that silver mine, I hope, for it's a rotten——"

" Take out your paper." Mrs. Murray's

plump hand, in which she held the letter, shook a little, but her voice was quite firm. Dick drew writing materials towards him and dipped his pen.

“I’m ready.”

“The letter I wish you to write is to Mrs. Owen Challice.” The hand that rested on Dick’s shoulder felt the shock that ran through his veins. “So soon!” he said, with a kind of gasp.

Dinah gave an inarticulate cry, and her eyes, as she looked at Dick and noticed the withered paleness of his face, were full of fear.

“Hush, Dinah,” said Mrs. Murray almost sternly. “Dick, my dear, you don’t understand. This is a great trouble, but it is not the kind of trouble you are thinking of, and it will fall on some one else as well as on you; on some one whom you love, my poor boy. Dick, think of it, my dear ;

it is harder for her than for you. Dick, my dear——” her voice grew urgent and anxious.

Dick sat like a statue, with a fixed look on his white face, full of some intense thought that made him deaf to all she was saying. “Dinah,” said Mrs. Murray piteously, looking at the young girl, “make him understand.”

Dinah’s quick instinct had divined it all. That and some unexplained hints and suggestions of last night were made clear to her now. She came a step forward, her lips were tremulous but she commanded her voice to say—

“Dick, our dear Venice is in great trouble, in saddest trouble; the man whom she loves is married to another.”

“Most unhappily married,” a tear trickled down Mrs. Murray’s cheek and fell on her hand.

Dinah's voice seemed somehow to reach Dick and break the horrible spell that had held him. His brain had received her words, but as yet he could not grasp their full meaning. "If Challice is married then Venice is free," he said, unconsciously thinking aloud; then as the sense of what all this must mean to her urged itself upon him, he started up with a dreadful anger flaming through him and burning in his face. "He is a scoundrel—a villain," he said, and his voice shook with passion as he poured out a torrent of incoherent words. Then with a groan he sank on his seat again—"And I brought him to her," he said; "but for me he would never have seen her."

The two women looked at each other in helpless silence; the tears were dropping quite unhindered now over Mrs. Murray's cheeks, and in a sudden access of pity and

kindness she stooped and kissed him as if it had been son of her own for whom her heart was wrung. Perhaps she could not have done anything better ; words are such a cheap consolation.

Dick looked up with a wan smile breaking through his misery. "Venice has no mother," he said, "and I'm all the brother she ever had." He did not ask any questions or seem to doubt the truth of Mrs. Murray's assertion ; it seemed as if he had known it all already.

Dinah's face was hidden, but when she heard him rise and cross the room she knew, without needing any explanation, that he had gone to Venice.

With the sound of the hall door being shut she crept over to Mrs. Murray, who had seated herself absently in Dick's vacant place. Dinah sat down on the floor and buried her face in the other's lap ; and for

a time the two mingled their tears together. Dinah was the first to dry her eyes; she was apt to despise the crying order of women, and already she was bracing herself to try if there was nothing to be done.

"How did you know about Mrs. Challice?" she asked.

"I never thought of his being her husband, but when I got the letter I felt sure."

"He always passed for unmarried." Dinah's voice was hard. Mrs. Murray handed her the note; it spoke for itself. It was written in a beautifully neat hand, on very thick paper, and was dated from a fashionable west-end street—

"MY DEAR MRS. MURRAY—I wonder if you have quite forgotten the travellers to whom you and your husband were so kind one summer several years ago in Sydney?

I, at least, have not forgotten the pleasant time that stands out very brightly in the picture of our Australian wanderings. We went to Melbourne and Adelaide—where, indeed, did we not go? I feel, I assure you, quite competent to stand an examination on the most delightful of our colonies.

“The Jeffreys left me to explore the Fiji Islands. I had proposed to go with them, but grew a little afraid of the fatigue and the roughness of the life—you know I was never meant to ‘rough it’—so I came home under a safe escort instead.

“And now I hear that you too have been drawn to this big London to which we all drift back; but I should not have felt certain that you were my Mrs. Murray unless I had had a glimpse of you driving the other day, and traced your address. May I come to see you very soon?

Remember me kindly to Mr. Murray, and believe me yours ever truly,

“A. L. CHALLICE.

“*P.S.*—I saw Owen, my husband, the other day. He knew me, but seemed sorry to see me. He is living at Notting-hill—so near me! Ah, my dear friend, I always had your sympathy!”

Dinah read the note twice over, critically. It rang false to her ear.

“She seems to be very fond of you,” she said, “and yet she doesn’t know that you are left alone.”

“She came with those friends of hers—Job liked to have company. She stayed two months.” Mrs. Murray spoke fragmentarily, as if she were doing her thinking aloud. “Job liked her—but——”

Dinah was left to fill up this hesitating pause as she would. She thought she

understood it all. The late Job, who wished to climb the social ladder, thought this young woman might help him ; she spent two months under his roof—two months that gave Mrs. Murray no pleasure, of that she could be sure.

“It takes a woman to know another woman,” she said.

“She’s a beautiful young woman, Dinah, and with a sorrowful story, as she told it, nobody could help taking an interest in her ; but——” she lowered her voice as if she were giving shape to treason—“but I came to think that a beautiful face does not always mean a beautiful nature, and—I used to be very sorry for the husband.”

“I could have been sorry for him too—once,” said Dinah bitterly ; “but not now, not now. Wasn’t it enough for him to spoil his own life——”

“My dear,” said Mrs. Murray, with the

charity that only comes with middle life, "wait till you know more before you judge."

Dinah's answer was cut short by sounds of arrival. Both recognised the tones of a strident voice at the same instant.

"It's the black silk dress and the yellow feather," said Dinah, with the calmness of despair.

"I can't see her, Dinah, my dear, I can't see her." Mrs. Murray rose helplessly. "Not to-day, not after this——"

"And indeed you shan't. Look here," Dinah hurried her friend through a side door, and led her by a back stair to her own bedroom. "You are ill, my dear, it's a fib, but there's no help for it. If I said you were not at home, she would walk through the house till she found you; but she'll respect the fear of infection."

Dinah hustled her bewildered patient into bed with her boots on; she barely

remembered in time to remove the pink ribbons, and to draw the blinds. "Parker," she said to the maid, whom she met on the landing; "your mistress has had bad news and she is lying down; she's not to be disturbed."

Dinah laughed as she ran downstairs, wondering what name she should give to Mrs. Murray's indisposition; you might as well try to prick a rhinoceros with a pin as expect Mrs. Brimble to comprehend that sadness of the heart that is born of sympathy. Dinah's own heart had been sad enough, but it rose at the thought of the battle before her. She shut her eyes for a moment as she paused at the drawing-room door, and she conjured up a mental vision of the throne under the chandelier, and the rose-crowned heathen goddess seated on it—the goddess whom she must propitiate and yet thwart; it was therefore with a

sensation of surprise, that Dinah saw her visitor standing near the fireplace, and looking fixedly into the empty grate.

Mrs. Brimble wore her own dress, but she had the bonnet with the yellow feather on her head, and she carried herself with a suggestion of sour elation that was very astonishing indeed.

"Dinah Kenyon," began Mrs. Brimble, turning on the girl as she entered the room, "why did you send my cap home without the silver paper? Oh, you're looking at the bonnet!—well, and how do you think I was to bring the bonnet except upon my head? Do you suppose my girls would let me carry a bandbox through London?"

This was really very clever of Mrs. Brimble, and Dinah found herself smiling, for in this way the bonnet might be the occasion of daily visits — "Unless," said

Dinah slowly—"unless you left it behind and borrowed another—but there would always be the same difficulty ; you would still have to bring it on your head."

"The bonnet never suited Mary Murray's complexion,"—another woman might have blushed, but this one only looked hard with her greenish eyes at the girl before her. "And if there's anything I hate, it's not knowing whether your clothes are your own or somebody else's. If Mary Murray was to take back this bonnet now, what would people say, but that she was wearing a cast-off one of mine? Dinah Kenyon, what would they say but that?"

"I see," Dinah answered gravely ; "perhaps the same remark might be made about the dress?"

"The dress," said Mrs. Brimble severely ; "the dress would fit no woman that's made except Mary Murray. It's as

ill-cut a gown as ever I saw. My Maria or my Em'ly will bring it back to-morrow. They'll come to lunch, for it's a long way to come for nothing. But I didn't come here to argue," she said with sudden heat ; "Dinah Kenyon, you're always arguing, and it isn't your place to argue. I came to tell Mary Murray about that black silk, and I haven't time to stay, for I'm going to meet Lord Heatherleigh, and to keep him waiting is what I know better than to do."

Dinah understood now the look of sour elation that had so surprised her, for to have secured a noble lord and a new bonnet in one day was a triumph any woman might be proud of. By what rare stroke of fortune had Lord Heatherleigh been secured? Had he been bribed by the prospect of cheap groceries when he married the Hon. Evelyn, or was he only,

after all, like other untitled creatures, flattered by a woman's flattery? Mrs. Brimble dropped a remark as she rustled out of the room that gave Dinah a new light.

"That friend of yours who lives by his poetry is not a bad young man, but a thousand a year is what their papa would never hear of. But Dinah Kenyon, a thousand a year is what a girl who is only a companion need never look for. Never, Dinah Kenyon, never; it's out of the question."

Dinah was busy with that mental process called putting two and two together, the two in this instance being Mr. Papillon and Lord Heatherleigh, and she let this shaft speed past her unheard.

"I hope," she said softly, regarding her departing guest, "I hope Lord Heatherleigh will like the bonnet."

She went upstairs in a very subdued frame of mind. She had set her poet a Herculean task, and he had not stuck at it; he had said he would do a great deal for her.

"She did not even ask for you, dear," she said as she opened the door of Mrs. Murray's room, but when she got up to the bed she saw that her mistress had fallen asleep. Dinah sat down in an easy chair and leaned her head against the pillow. She forgot Mrs. Brimble and even Mr. Papillon very soon, and her thoughts went out aching after Dick; Dick, who had renounced his own sorrow that he might comfort Venetia's. For the first time, perhaps, she felt herself consciously in revolt against the pain and suffering of life, and its pathos was not the less pathetic because she saw it for the moment broadly relieved against a back-

ground of farce. She wanted a world where no desire should remain unfulfilled, where no one should make another's unhappiness—and for such a world we must wait. She had yet to learn that the path of self-denial leads at last and most surely to the light. Perhaps the old ascetics who preached this doctrine painfully, and sometimes with anguish, were not so far wrong as we like to think them.

It was no surprise that Dick did not return that day; they could quite easily account for his absence. He came the next, and he tried as before to merge himself in his work, but this time without any success. He was moody and silent, and trouble seemed to fall on him now without any power on his part to resist it. But Dick's nature always needed the relief of speech, and before twenty-four hours were over he had told them that his errand had

been fruitless. Venetia had left London and gone home. She had not waited for poor Dick's comforting ; her sorrow was beyond his healing.

"She left the very next day," he said. "They saw that she was set on going, and they did not keep her. Granny tells me she has been home-sick all this while." He looked absently out of the window ; he was saying to himself, "If she had stayed in Scotland this would never have happened." But in this he was wrong.

"Did she go alone?" Dinah thought of the sorrow that travelled northwards with her that day.

"They had heard of some people who were going. Granny could not leave her husband. Challice has gone abroad," he added, his voice suddenly hardening.

This last piece of news gave great relief to both his listeners, they could hardly

have told why, except that being women they shrank from the extremes to which a man's passion may lead him. When Dick in his new restlessness proposed to follow Venetia to Scotland, they caught eagerly at the suggestion. They urged him to pack that moment ; there was yet time to catch the last train ; they set about all those useless little preparations that women love to make for their travelling mankind, and supplied him with sandwiches, flasks, rugs, literature, as if he were bound on a voyage to the moon. He was a hero to them both, and one of them, at least, thought his heroism should not go unrewarded ; she, being of a sanguine and cheerful temperament, wiped a tear away to smile as she watched the disappearing cab.

“ Perhaps — after all — who knows, Dinah,” she began, but Dinah shook her head.

Dick had only been gone two days when Mrs. Owen Challice's card was brought into the library, where the two ladies, left solitary, preferred to sit. Mrs. Murray read the name with a surging back of thought to the old life in Sydney, when Job had been taken with this young lady, and had thought that London had sent him its best. He had been proud to have her for a guest, and she did not even know that Job was dead. Mrs. Murray put up her hand unconsciously to her gay little bows of ribbon ; she had not mourned for her husband as other widows mourn.

"Go and tell her, dear," she said, shrinking back into her seat. "Go first and tell her Job is dead."

Dinah complied without a word. She was reluctant and yet strangely eager to see this person whose blooming life made a tragedy for other people, and she went

without hesitation straight into the drawing-room. There, under the drooping chandelier, with its grotesque memory of Mrs. Brimble, sat a beautiful young lady, so young in looks that Dinah could hardly believe that she had been married twelve years ago. She was richly yet very quietly dressed in grays and faint tints that suggested a widow's lighter mourning. She had a great grace and ease of manner, and she was fond of making delicate allusions to some vague, sorrowful experience, which most people thought added greatly to her interest. Dinah found out some of those things afterwards—about the same time that she discovered the secret of the lady's youthful and beautiful looks. Her face was smooth and unwrinkled, because she had no heart within to suffer and fret the brow and the mouth with tell-tale lines. This lack of heart is a better antiseptic

than any cosmetic, and is the true elixir of life.

Dinah gave her message with a certain bluntness ; to be thus brusque is a temptation some of us feel with very gracious people, as if our words must be hurled to make any impression on so smooth a surface.

Mrs. Owen Challice stopped smiling, and used all the conventional expressions of regret ; if she did not feel sorry she said she was. When Mrs. Murray came in, Dinah slipped away to the window ; she did not care to witness the meeting between them, and to hear again this tale of "so grieved" and "so shocked." She would not even allow this stranger the recognised amount of humbug we all wink at in each other, knowing that it would make the world too ugly if our speech accorded exactly with our thought. But Dinah was

not long left to her own speculations ; Mrs. Owen Challice liked to draw every one into the circle of her graciousness ; it was this tact, this interest in others—a mere trick of manner—that made her a favourite with many people, who pitied her for her sad lot, separated from a husband who, from some unexplained cause, had spoiled her life.

Dinah found herself listening with a sort of fascination to the talk, which Mrs. Murray did very little to support. Mrs. Challice left one with an impression of utmost propriety ; you felt sure that not a hint of scandal had ever been breathed against her ; she had renounced all the gaieties that are for happy people, and occupied herself much with ritualistic practices. She was very devout and punctual in confessing her sins, and she spent most of her time in needlework for the particular

church she attended. Her dear Mrs. Murray must come with her to St. Michael's, the services were so comforting. Mrs. Murray declined rather abruptly ; she preferred the familiar Scotch service, she said, such as they had at Sydney, when Mrs. Challice went with Job.

Mrs. Challice remembered, and would like to go again. Ah, those were happy days! Dinah sat staring at her, vainly trying to discover her motive—what did she want? what end had she in view? She would have liked some one to read this woman for her. The Anglican priest to whom she confessed could tell nothing at all, but her maid might—yes, her lady's-maid might.

“I think in beautiful Sydney I almost forgot my sad story,” she was saying, “but here I cannot forget it. Lord Heatherleigh is very kind to me—he has always

been kind. He wishes me to make my home with Lady Jane when he marries—here in London, where my husband is. I told you I had seen him, and he seemed so sorry to see me. How can I stay here?”

Dinah got up quickly. “Your husband has left London,” she said. “You are not likely to see him again; he has left London, but not for you, not for you——”

She did not wait to see the effect of her words, which were chiefly uttered as a relief to herself. She did not much care how Mrs. Challice took them.

It happened that the ladies did not meet again that evening till just before dinner, and then there was only a word about the visitor.

“I think she won’t come back again.” It was Mrs. Murray who spoke.

“I think she will. She will never

quarrel with any one, but if you happened to love her, she would just smother the life out of you, slowly but surely——”

“They say she married him for his money, and that he cared for her once.”

“A boy’s generous love broken against a rock,”¹ said Dinah musingly. “Yes; I can see how it might have been.”

But she did not pity Challice. If he was not wicked he was weak, and for weakness she had only a young girl’s daring contempt. She did not pity him.

III.

OWEN CHALLICE had truly set out from his hotel to go abroad on the day after Mrs. Murray's reception—to journey anywhere so that it were distant enough—to fly from himself, if that might be.

He should not now hear Venice sing as she crossed the lawn or drifted with the tide down the river ; she might sing for others, but no more for him. The cottage by the Thames was all decked and ready, and he had offered it to Mrs. Arabin, to whom he said in his note that a sudden duty called him abroad. At the last moment he felt that this curt good-bye was impossible to him ; some sad fear weighed

upon his heavy heart and drew his steps irresistibly to the familiar house ; he remembered his old friend with whom he had sauntered through so many idle hours, up and down these well-known streets, and he said to himself that he must shake him by the hand once more.

He stopped his cab some yards from the house and got out ; it seemed to his oppressed spirit that a greater silence than usual hung about the place ; the windows were open, but no music came out to him. The servant who opened the door, and who knew him quite well, told him that Mr. Arabin was asleep ; Chalice lingered a moment hesitatingly, and then she added, as if it were almost a superfluous bit of news to him, " Miss Dundas left for Scotland yesterday."

He turned away and stumbled down the steps hardly seeing where he went.

His heart beat quickly. Why had she gone? Why had she gone?

Some twenty hours later he, too, was in Scotland. Once more he stood among those green silences where he had first seen Venice; where some five or six weeks ago he had gaily left her under a promise to meet her within a day or two in London. The hills in their inviolable calm seemed to be beyond and above time; they were the same; it was only he who was different. It was a brooding July day, and there had come up out of the east a grayness that wrapped the distant landscape and made a curtain between earth and heaven. Just such a pall there lay upon his spirit; for him, too, there was no light beyond. He hardly knew why he had come except that some wild impulse had driven him here, and now that he was here, what was he going to do? He could not tell.

He had wandered, almost without conscious aim, to a silent fold among the hills, where the Reverend John Crookshanks and some fifty more "true covenanted presbyterians," who fell at the battle of Rullion Green, lie buried. He had come here with Venetia, and he had read the inscription on the worn stone with the intellectual sympathy and the ready imagination that lent a most picturesque interest to this record of an ended struggle. This solitary martyr's grave faces all the rolling valley and the distant sea, but when Challice stood there the gray had crept near, and in the sad enclosure of woods behind there was a sighing of the wind—that most melancholy sighing of wind through pines that strikes cold upon the heart.

He lingered, caring little to stay and still less to go ; he wondered drearily why he had come from London—not surely to

meditate on the work of Mr. Thomas Bins of Dalziel finished these two hundred and odd years ago? A sorrow that is two centuries old may stir the imagination, but hardly the heart. A moment later and he knew why he had come—his pulses throbbed on at a bound, and his heart seemed to stop beating. Over the hills straight to him Venice was coming; before he saw her the sheep had heard her light step and stopped cropping to lift their heads and gaze.

She drew near, but she looked at him at first with a strange unrecognition in her eyes; when at last she seemed to be aware of his presence she grew a little paler but she said quietly, as if it hardly surprised her, "I did not know you were here."

"I came—I came——" he began, then with a sort of cry in his voice—"I came because I could not stay away."

There is a flat stone that lifts itself out of the grass quite close to the railing that encloses the grave. Venice sank down on it. Challice leant his weight against the rusty railing ; his eyes were fixed on the gray mist ; he was seeing beyond it at last—he was seeing his own life as it would be without Venetia. She had been his immortality ; he turned with a shuddering, sick distaste from the days when he would know her no more ; better far death and silence. Then a wild question clamoured in his brain—why strive any more, why resist to blood and death ? Was not life his and love—he looked down at the girl at his feet—and love—the blood rushed hotly to his brow—could he doubt it any more ?

As if she heard him she looked up. Her beautiful eyes were clear and direct in their gaze, though there was a world of sadness in their depths.

"Don't be sorry you came," she said ;
"yours is a very sad story, but I am glad
to know it if I can help you to bear the
pain of it."

"I never knew it was sad till I saw
you," he said passionately. "All these
years I was happy enough. She was a
girl, little older than you when we married,
and yet that was what marriage came to
mean for me. She passed out of my
memory—out of my life. I was happy,
quite happy and content without her, and
she without me. I went my way, and she
hers. The world blames me alone ; you
will hear no whisper against her, and yet—
she has murdered my life."

"No," said Venetia, she got up and
stood beside him, "nobody can do that.
It is we who make our lives our own selves ;
we can make them anything we like."

"Must I make mine hard ; must I go

away?" he said desperately. She hardly spoke above a whisper, and yet he heard her "Yes."

"I will bear it," he said, drawing his breath quickly, "I will go away and never see you more if you will tell me one thing. Tell me, Venice, look me in the eyes and tell me I have not spoiled your life too? You are sorry for me out of your deep kindness, but the shadows are only for me. There is sunlight for you. Tell me only this and I shall take up my burden and go."

It was cruel of him to press her, and he knew it when he saw her flush and pale, and yet it gave him a wild comfort to know that he did not suffer alone.

"Ah," she said, with a sob that would not be restrained, "you thought that—that I did not care——"

He started from his leaning position

and took a step forward. "Venice," he said hoarsely, "Venice!" His whole desire seemed to go out in that cry; all the hot heart of him was in it. Once again that old question clamoured in his brain, and then with a mental shock, that was like a blow, he saw where he was drifting, and he stepped back as from a dreadful precipice that had opened at his feet. He never knew whence help came to him, but it always seemed to him afterwards as if some good angel had barred his way with righteous flaming sword. "I thought that the trouble was all mine and that I might pass away from your life and leave you happy——" he stopped with a dumb and wretched appeal in his face. "I have been a coward—a miserable coward," he said with a sharp pang of remorse and self-contempt. The reticence which he had held to be his unassailable privilege showed

itself to his purged vision as a shameless weakness; with no adequate motive to justify it, his silence had been criminal.

Venice dropped the hands that hid her face and said, calming her sobs: "Never mind, I would rather bear it with you. You will go away and we shall not see each other any more, but some day when we are both quite old, or in some other life if not in this, we shall meet again. And I shall always be glad to have known you,"—she looked at him with brave, unselfish comfort in her eyes,—“always. And some day I shall hear about you, something that will make me very proud, and I shall know that you have redeemed your life that you thought thrown away.”

As the thrilling voice came to him it seemed to Challice as if this grave beside him were for one or other of them, and that these words were a last parting on this side

of time. It had the sadness and the finality that belongs to death, for he knew that they should meet no more while either of them walked this earth. With the thought he felt his passion sink and die away, shamed before her brave courage. He even controlled his anguish—there was time and to spare for it—that he might listen as one who listens to words that are spoken from life's last shore. There was something of an angel's goodness and purity in the face that she lifted to him. He never forgot her as she looked at him then, her great eyes full of sadness and love, and yet so eagerly lit with longing to comfort him as she said :

“You will be brave and live to do something great and good?”

He came a step nearer and their hands met tremblingly.

“I will live to be worthy of your trust,”

he said. "Good-bye, good-bye;" he lifted the hand he held and kissed it with a great reverence, as one kisses the dead. "God comfort you and bless you," he said brokenly, and fearing the surge of sorrow that would not be kept back any longer, he turned away from her suddenly.

Once only he looked back and saw her standing by the railing, where he had left her, and then the gray mist parted them.

He knew, as if it had been revealed to him, that he should never see her any more—never through all the toiling, grinding years that he might drag out before death called him—never again. Love had come so late only to mock him. The full cup had been dashed from his lips before he had so much as tasted its sweetness; henceforward he must go lonely. It was a terrible moment when he realised this loveless loneliness that was his lot; a

chasm divided him from the past, and the future was an untried world, unlit with hope. A black despair took hold of him and held him in its clutch; he had no strength even to wrestle with it; there were many hours of that summer day for which he could never afterwards account to himself, and when he recovered consciousness, it seemed to him as if he had known the anguish of death, and that it was another than he who dragged a weary body through the lighted city on which he had stumbled unawares. We talk of another life as if death were the only entrance gate to it, but sometimes the other life begins on this side the grave.

As if in a dream Challice found himself in the old city street where he and Venice had created an enchanted world for themselves. The summer day was long over; the chimes swung out eleven deep slow

strokes in the crown above him, and the drink-shops put out their radiance reluctantly. In this the heart of the town the streets were still busy, and many people jostled him as he stood a loiterer among the home-going crowds, but he never even noticed it. He was living over again that day so near and yet so far off; up this stony slope they had seen Montrose riding with gay serenity like a bridegroom to his death, flinging proudly back the taunts of Argyle: he had thought it a very pretty tragedy, set as picturesquely as historian could desire.

“So may my tragedy appear to those who come after me,” he thought, with a bitter smile, “and their own sorrows will be unapproached, as mine is to me.” The deep irony of his lot crushed him as he turned away. So near to love and yet to miss it. So near to happiness and only despair instead.

As he walked slowly downwards to the new town the lights that still burned sparsely were being blotted out one by one, and the gray mists wrapped the city and hushed it to sleep. He dragged himself heavily along, and a deep desire for rest and forgetfulness came to him. There played idly about his memory the words of an old inscription—written by some other wrung heart stilled into peace these many years—above a lintel in one of the wynds he had left behind :

“He that tholes, overcomes.”

Some natural association had recalled the saying, but it was not till he had repeated it many times that its meaning slowly crept into his brain.

“He that tholes, overcomes ;” it was as if Venetia’s voice had reached him with this last message of hope to light his dark world.

IV.

MR. DUNDAS was sitting in his dim library one evening, where it was his unvarying custom to retire after dinner with the newspaper.

His household respected this seclusion, and it was quite understood that he did not study all the time. He had been nodding and recovering himself for some half-hour, and had finally wakened to the knowledge that Venice would be waiting tea for him. He stretched himself lazily and was preparing to rise when he caught sight of something outside that arrested him in the middle of a yawn.

There, stumping along the terrace, bag

in hand, the soft rain falling on him unheeded, came Dick—no dream, but real flesh and blood Dick.

Mr. Dundas stared, rubbed his eyes, and stared again. Then he laughed humorously to himself. Only the other day the girl had come back, tired, as she said, of the whirl of town, and here already the boy had followed her. Nothing could well have pleased him more or better suited his plans and hopes. He rose with alacrity and tapped on the window: Dick, who was going along with his head down, stopped, turned round, and came back a step. The laird was busy a minute fumbling with the lock, then he wrenched open the sash, and Dick placing his two hands on the sill jumped in and shook hands heartily.

“Well, well, well”—the laird stood with his hand on Dick’s shoulder—“who would

have thought it!" he laughed again. "Why didn't you write for the dog-cart to meet you?"

"I came off in a hurry, and I've no luggage, as you see."

"Nothing wrong up there, eh?" said the laird with a shade of anxiety in his voice. "I heard from Mary this morning, she didn't say that there was anything the matter." (Mary was Mrs. Arabin.)

"No," said Dick, "there's nothing different there,"—he paused with a sense of creeping constraint; the laird seemed so unconscious of any motive on his part for this hurried journey. He was confused and bewildered, and a wild hope shot through his heart. What if he had been wrong in his guesses after all? "I would have come with Venice the other day, but I did not know she meant to leave; I heard nothing till she had gone."

"Ah," said Mr. Dundas, taking long lazy strides up and down the room, "she gave you all the slip and came back to me. She knew that I should find the old house dull without her, and I did, Dick, I did."

"Did she say"—Dick was still standing by the table, his face turned away; he hardly knew how to frame his question, "did she say she was tired of it?"

"Just that, you made her do too much among you. She has her mother's constitution," he said after a silence, "she is best quiet, but she'll be all right now you've come." He crossed over and laying his hand on Dick's arm, turned him swiftly towards the fading light, looking at him with examining kindness. Dick's colour rose uneasily under the scrutiny; he was afraid of what his face might betray. "You don't look up to much either," he said, and then he laughed again. "Well,

I knew you'd tire of it in time, but I hardly dared to hope it would be quite so soon, Dick, my lad."

"I haven't come to stay," said Dick quickly, "I—I had just a wish to run down for a day or two, but I have not tired of my work."

"Not tired of running after a woman's foolish fancies?"

"There's more to do than that;" the secretary smiled as he thought of the charities and the claimants and above all of the sheep. "A large part of Mrs. Murray's money is invested in an Australian sheep run under the care of a manager, and if I'm not mistaken there's some juggling work going on over there. She won't have a lawyer's opinion, and I can't make much out of the business, but I had her leave to bring the accounts and correspondence down for you to look at." He

spoke more freely now that he had got on a neutral subject.

"Well," said the laird cheerfully, "if there's anything I do know about, it's sheep. I'll tackle those letters with you, Dick." He sat down in his chair and began to clear a space on the desk before him. "Are the papers in your bag? Have them out, my boy, and I'll just take a glance at them."

Dick saw that he quite thirsted to be at the matter at once; he dearly loved a little bit of business, especially another person's business, as many men of leisure do, and it pleased him to be consulted.

"Ah," he said, "we'll bring the rascal to book between us, never fear." Dick stooped to undo the straps of his bag, wondering how he could best frame an excuse to postpone the sheep question,

when the laird's thoughts seemed to take a new direction.

"By the way, have you seen anything of Challice lately?" he asked. Dick's head was bent as he struggled with an obstinate strap. The colour rushed to his face. "He has gone abroad," he said curtly.

"In something of a hurry, surely?"

Dick bending over his task made no answer.

"Did you know that he was married?" the laird's tone was gravely curious; not indignant or scornful as Dick had expected.

Dick straightened himself slowly. "Two days ago I heard it for the first time," he said, and then he added with sudden bitterness; "if I had known it two months ago, he should never have entered this door—but I took him for a gentleman."

“That’s just what Heatherleigh says ; odd that he should write to me, wasn’t it ? Where’s his letter, I wonder ?” Mr. Dundas began searching among the contents of his desk, while Dick looked at him in amaze. This was a strange reception to give such news. “ Says he feels bound to tell me what he is certain his kinsman has concealed from me — looks a little fishy, doesn’t it, eh ? He ought to have told, there’s no doubt of that ; two months, as you say, and never a whisper of a wife.” The laird had given up his fruitless search among the confused papers and lay back in his chair. He had pushed back his spectacles and looked at Dick with speculation in his eyes ; “ But you see, Dick, a man might make a hopeless blunder at the beginning of his life, and be ashamed of it ever after. Marriage is a queer thing, Dick ; it tries and tests like nothing else,

it's either a hit or a miss with most men."

"I hear nothing against the lady," said Dick hardly. "Lord Heatherleigh owns and befriends her; she was married from his house."

"Well, well, well, how can we tell?" said Mr. Dundas, getting up. "She might make him unhappy enough in spite of her respectability, and if his lordship had a hand in the match——" he shrugged his shoulders significantly. "But he ought to have told. If I had had two girls there might have been mischief, but I've only one, and her thoughts were busy somewhere else."

He laughed, but Dick did not join him; he was glad of the gathering twilight that hid his face. How could he tell the father that his child loved the man who was bound by irrevocable ties to some one else? He had thought as he travelled

northwards that he would denounce Chalice, but here, with the chance before him, his tongue refused to speak.

"I haven't seen Venetia," he said, suddenly anxious of all things to get away.

"To be sure." Mr. Dundas sat down in his chair again, and drew it resolutely to the desk. "Ring for lights, Dick, and I'll just take a glance at those papers," he said. "Venice won't want me now you've come."

Dick rang the bell, and left the room. He crossed the hall slowly, and lingered hesitatingly outside the drawing-room door. It was clear that Mr. Dundas knew and guessed nothing ; what if there was indeed nothing to know ? The first glance of Venetia's face would tell him all, and it was thus that he hesitated, loth to lose his last hope. He opened the door quietly ; for a moment Venetia did not see him,

and in that moment he seemed to read her soul.

The misty rain had chilled the air, and there was a small fire burning in the grate. She sat before it, looking into the flames with thoughts that were astray. As he came farther into the room, she turned round and started. It was no mental picture of Dick she had seen in the flames, or she would not have been so surprised to see him there.

"Why, Dick," she said, rising quickly, and waiting for him to come and take her by the hand, "you don't bring bad news?" she asked, with a sudden fear at her heart.

"I bring no news at all, my dear; only myself."

"Then Mr. Arabin isn't worse?"

"Not even ill. Only a little, a very little older."

"Ah, I can't think of him growing old!"

“He never will ; some day he will just go to sleep, and waken up young and strong again.”

“When—did you come?” she asked, but he knew that she meant—“Why did he come.” She too, seemed to seek a motive for his journey.

“You did not send for me, Venice,” he said, answering the unspoken question, “but I came—because—I thought perhaps you might need me.”

“I always want you, Dick, my brother,” she said, gently and low, and then Dick knew.

He still held her hand. She bent her head, and passed her cheek with a mute caress across his sleeve. “Why, you are quite wet,” she said, as if she were glad of something to say. “Your coat is quite wet, and you haven’t changed it.”

"I think it rained as I walked up from the station."

"It has rained all day." She gave him a gentle push, and said with something of her old authority, "Go at once and change it. Your old room is ready for you; it is just as you left it. The padre and David too, were always sure that you would come back, and now you have come."

"But not to stay—unless you wish it, Venice," he spoke wistfully.

"Ah, no," she said, "this is a dull world; it is only good for the padre and me, who love quiet and the old ways. But the big fighting world is for you, Dick—for you to conquer. I know it now, because I have been there and seen."

Dick went off to his room and found a coat. Everything lay in readiness for him; the news of his coming had already reached the servants, and David was lying

in wait to shake him patronisingly by the hand. It reminded Dick vividly of his school and college days, when he had come home with a sort of princely importance that stirred the house from garret to cellar. They had grumbled, and were secretly pleased to see him then, and they were glad to have him back now, and expected him to stay—all but Venetia, who knew he was but a passing guest. In his heart of hearts he said that she was right; it was in the big working world that he must fight his trouble down, and he must leave her here in the silence with her sorrow.

“Dick,” said Mr. Dundas, when he joined them at tea, “I’ve been glancing at these letters, and I don’t like them at all. They’re not satisfactory—not at all satisfactory; we must get at the bottom of this business. Do you think Mrs. Murray

would object to my consulting Marshall—he's a long-headed fellow, Marshall, and he knows what he's about."

"I don't know," Dick hesitated. "She has a strange dislike to lawyers. I think it will end in my having to go out and interview the sheep myself, and listen to their grievances. How would you like a voyage to the other side of the world, Venice?"

"Too far away," she said, smiling at him.

Mr. Dundas was busy pondering the question of Marshall; he revelled in a good tough bit of business, and the more lawyering in it the better; there was a lingering remnant in his blood of the combative spirit that had made him revolt in his youth.

Dick marvelled that he could not see; that he busied himself with trifles, and

never read the change in Venetia's face. It was so plainly to be seen, for now that the lamp was lit he furtively looked at her from time to time, and seemed always to read more clearly the traces that pain had left on it. Who can pass through the fire and come out into the empty land beyond it the same as he was before? It was mostly in her eyes—those beautiful, speaking eyes—that he read her secret. They had an absent look as if they saw some world that was closed to him, and into which he might never hope to enter ; some past that was wholly past, as if life had broken off there, and was begun again on a new pattern.

All tea-time Dick sat tortured with fear that Challice's name might be mentioned. Deep in his heart there burned a thirst for revenge on the man who had so abused the trust and kindness shown to him in this

very house. It did not make him the less bitter—rather perhaps the more—that he had himself been the first to extend him that confidence; he went in his mind all over their early meeting in Italy, and it startled him to remember how very little he had really known of the guest whom he had brought home to be honoured and welcomed as a friend. It only needed to look in Venetia's face, to meet the sadness of her eyes, to revive in full his bitter anger, and he feared if Challice's name occurred that he should not be able to restrain the torrent of his passionate contempt.

Fortunately for him Mr. Dundas was entirely absorbed in the question of having or not having Marshall added to their councils, and he made Dick sit down and write that very night urging Mrs. Murray to give her consent.

For the next few days they virtually breakfasted, lunched, and dined on the sheep question ; Mr. Dundas sat a great deal in the library surrounded with large sheets of blue paper. He toiled up mountains of figures, generally with a stumble by the way that only gave him an excuse for beginning again, and when he pounced on a mistake he could not innocently enough admire his own acuteness. Dick was usually obliged to aid in this investigation, and he did it impatiently enough, with a mind distracted by many dark thoughts. When they were not in the library together they were generally tramping the hills side by side, for the laird had a fancy that his own sheep might prove an enlightening commentary on the unlucky sheep across the sea. Dick thus saw little of his old playmate ; in anything that he did see of her, however, he found her fulfilling the

small cares and duties that had always fallen to her ; she seemed to mete out her life into a multitude of trivial deeds as if to crowd out time for lonely thought ; she made the house gay with flowers ; she fed her birds ; she went nightly to the library to fill her father's pipe as she had done any time these dozen years—in everything she was the same as before with a mighty difference that was plain to Dick's enlightened eyes.

Dick took his own share of trouble as a man does—more rebelliously. He had lost his boyish look and much of his old brightness, and the knowledge that there was one name that must never pass his lips, one feeling he must bury unspoken, made him restless and at times moody.

As a safe subject, Venice and he often spoke of Dinah's experiment and its chances of success. Dick was eager for

it to succeed, though he could not help sometimes forgetting his heaviness to laugh a little at the mischances he and Dinah met with in their crusade. The Friday gatherings reminded him, he said, of a bas-relief he had seen in Italy, where fauns and satyrs, and wild creatures of the woods, were represented dancing with lords and ladies and ethereal beings who might be intended for angels.

"I suppose Dinah is the angel," said Venice, with a little smile.

"An angel with a sword, then," said Dick, laughing as he told the story of the lady who had been successfully foiled when she came to rescue her son.

"Tut, tut," said the laird, who had joined them, "your little friend had better take care, Venice, or she may find herself some day playing with edged tools. It's all very well for ladies to amuse themselves, but

that mixing up of class with class never answers :—socialistic, communistic stuff. People should be contented with the place in life to which they are born, as the English prayer-book very sensibly points out. I don't ask to dine with dukes and princes ; why should my grocer or bootmaker expect to dine with me ? Depend on it, Dick, my boy, you won't mend the world by lifting people out of their proper niche."

"Well," said Dick, with a hint of humour in his eyes, "you must own that I've shown a desire to keep to my own niche."

"Pish !" said the laird testily, "radical stuff and nonsense. Your niche is here, sir, among your equals."

"You had those thoughts once too, padre, when you were a boy," said Venice, laying her cheek against his shoulder. "You were a very radical boy, I know,

and your parents and guardians were shocked at your sentiments."

"Eh? what do you know about these things?" he laughed and put an arm round her waist. "Well, well, we all have our dreams, and they mostly come to nothing. Dick will come back to us when he awakens out of his."

"If it should be a dream," Dick amended; "but I have yet to find out that it is."

Mr. Dundas shot out his under lip and shook his head. "You young fellows must buy your own experience," he said; "but I've lived longer than you, Dick, and I tell you these ideas lead to nothing but social explosions and the insanity of revolutions."

"Yet the greatest revolutionist the world ever knew or will know was a carpenter in Nazareth, and we are all

ready to acknowledge the divine right of the three Galilee fishermen and the tent-maker of Tarsus," said Dick doggedly, yet with reverence.

"The world's an older world since then, my boy, and we must take it as we find it,"—the laird laid his hand on Dick's shoulder. "Make it a better if you can, but if it should disappoint you with its ingratitude—there is always your home here." He spoke with a certain wistfulness that touched Dick greatly.

"It will always be home to me, sir," he said; but he knew that he should come back to it only now and then, as to a place of rest after toil. For he felt more and more that if he hoped for peace, he must win it through labour. The old life was no longer possible to him; its ease and quiet seemed to stifle him; he sickened for the world of action—for the full tide of

existence that in London sweeps men on in its flood.

"There is no danger of my doing too much," he said, in answer to Venetia's fears; "my only dread is that it may be too easy a life. If there's any danger of martyrdom it is for Dinah; I'm afraid, in her zeal for sacrifice, she may even marry Mr. Jack Brimble, for the sake of helping him to keep shop."

Venice smiled. She privately thought it much more likely that Dinah might yield to the fascination of "well-dressed culture and good manners" in the person of Mr. Papillon, but she kept her surmises to herself.

"Dick, Dick, you don't know anything about girls," she said.

He felt that he knew very little of one girl, whom yet he had known all his life; when she was cheerful, he mistrusted her

gaiety; when she was grave and quiet, as she often was, the old anger and sorrow and thirst for revenge burned in him.

On the last night of his stay—a hot summer night—these two were alone in the drawing-room. The window was wide open to the summer dusk, and Dick walked restlessly from it to the other end of the room and back again. He was oppressed with a longing to speak, and yet words seemed to fail him.

“It is very hot,” he said at last, taking refuge in the commonplace; “I think there will be a storm.”

“The glass is falling,” said the laird gloomily, thinking of his hay, as he came in with the newspaper, and carefully set the door wide. “Venice,” he said suddenly, “sing something, my lass, and help me to forget that unlucky hay. I haven’t heard you sing since you came back. What’s Dick

about—or was the music all for that sly fellow Challice, who passed himself off as a gay bachelor, eh?”

There was a moment's blank silence. Venetia, who was leaning back in a large chair, did not stir; her father had walked to the open door to tap the barometer that hung outside, and he did not seem to notice the pause. “Come, give us a duet, Dick,” he said; “the glass has fallen nearly an inch within the last three hours. Something cheerful.”

“There's one point I've forgotten to consult you about,” said Dick suddenly, coming forward. “It escaped me till this moment. If you don't mind putting the music off—I'd be glad to have your opinion on it.”

“To be sure,” said the laird, “come into the library; it's a good thing you remembered it in time.”

Dick passed Venetia's chair without looking at her. When they had left the room she rose swiftly and made her escape by the open window on to the terrace. The warm, brooding air hung like a veil over the valley ; she could hardly draw a free breath ; it was intensely, alarmingly still, and to the west there was piled a mass of red-edged cloud that held in it a dark threat of coming storm. She crossed the terrace and stood at its outer edge, near the worn statue she had once crowned with spring ; every leaf in the garden below her hung motionless ; the trees seemed to wait in a cowering suspense for the coming of the tempest. There was no sign of life anywhere, and the heavy air closed in the landscape as if it were the very world's end. Venetia shivered with a strange dread ; she felt as if she were forsaken ; the loneliness was cruel, and her heart

cried out against it ; her world, her own familiar world, was in league against her, and traitorously sought to renew the battle she had thought ended. All her new-found peace had vanished at a word. It was too hard ; it was not to be borne. She put her hands against the cold stone of the Psyche, and hid her face in them. She was shaken with her pent-up passion ; in the stillness of the night she could hear her own sobs.

Dick found her there by and by. The laird had made the most of the little point, which was a very little point indeed, but it is a question whether his wisdom enlightened Dick's doubts much. He listened with a mind on the rack for any sound from the room across the hall ; if Venetia escaped upstairs he should see her no more that night, and he felt that he must see her.

When at last he found her—just where

he had once met her before with the light of love and kindness in her eyes, and when he saw her, her slight figure shaken with long sighing sobs, all his passionate love and tenderness went out in the aching need to comfort her.

"Venice," he said brokenly, "Venice, can I do nothing at all to help you?"

She moved a little and looked at him. Her lips were too tremulous for words, but she shook her head slowly.

Dick went back to London next day. The laird let him go reluctantly, a little consoled by the permission to consult Marshall in private, and by the promise of an almost daily correspondence with Dick. Dick would have undertaken to write hourly if he had wished it, in his eagerness to fill his whole waking life with work.

In the very last days of the year news

reached an exile across the sea that the old man who had been his friend was dead. Mr. Arabin had ended his youth here to begin it somewhere else. Challice thought with an envious heart of the strange and sweet surprise, of the full satisfaction the other life—if there were indeed another life—must be to so simple a soul.

V.

Dick had gone down to the funeral, which took place in Scotland, and Dinah was waiting his return.

“Well?” she said, when the first greetings were over, “well, Dick?”

“I’ve nothing to tell you, Dinah,” he answered a little shortly, turning away. He had no good news for her such as she had hoped he might have. Dinah had secretly dreamed great things from this visit; she had hoped that in the softness of the new sorrow Venetia might turn to Dick for comfort; and then—well, she had pictured Dick coming back from this second journey to the North with a light in

his eyes that had not been there when he last returned, and instead he was looking more dreary than ever. He had hardly seen Venice; she was shut up with Mrs. Arabin and had few words for any one else; she looked slight and pale in her black dress and was wholly absorbed in her task of comforting.

It was a hard winter for Dick, who did not take the usual pleasure in life. He clung numbly to his work, and was only afraid lest some day he should find that it failed him. He read all the charitable reports, and even the tracts, and made a point of seeing each petitioner in person. Sometimes these unfortunates suffered unduly from his irritation; sometimes he was touched with a hint of trouble greater than his own, and gave with a needless generosity. The world was a place of dull discontent and shabby unattainment to

the secretary at this time; it seemed full of clamorous voices all seeking, begging, praying, for some good that was for ever denied them.

It one day occurred to him—always under the dread that his work might fall short of his needs—to make a personal investigation of the different charitable societies that appealed to his mistress for funds to carry on their work. He divided his days into hospitals, homes, mission chapels, crèches, associations: Monday was given to the guild for supplying washerwomen with tea and snuff, and Tuesday to the soap and water society. This took him down to the new country of the East, and there he came face to face with privations that inexpressibly belittled his own woes, and made them shrink to their true proportions.

It was a world that had lain hitherto

quite outside of his experience, and its wretchedness made the deeper impression on him because he had been used to associate poverty with men and women who came in rusty clothing on morning calls, and always ended by asking the loan of half a crown. He was sick of the people who had known Mr. Murray in Australia ; of the bolder band who claimed kinship with him. The deceased Mr. Murray seemed indeed to have had as many aunts and cousins as the hero of a popular play. But here was a lower deep ; a savage country only a stone's throw off, full of untold horrors. Dick grew terribly grim over this matter, and he had much difficulty in persuading his mistress that half-crowns or even sovereigns would not mend the sore ; if anything, he drew the purse-strings tighter, and bewildered her not a little by the heat of his arguments on the side of

State interference and protection. He was loud in his vehemence against the fashion that makes a pet and a plaything of the heathen abroad, and wholly ignores the same savage beast at home; of course he rushed into print, and though the newspapers inserted his appeals sparingly, it comforted him somewhat to have pointed out its duty to the government of his country. All this was very good for Dick, and in preaching the equal rights of citizenship, and helping, as he often could, to lighten some poor brother's or sister's burden, he wholesomely lessened the pressure of his own trouble, and above all, there faded from his mind the lingering desire to be revenged that had made him long to track Challice's steps and do him some ill.

While Dick was coming back to mental and moral health, Dinah was suffering a

certain depression of spirit. The Friday evenings were begun again as spring set in, but they were becoming more and more of an effort.

"We have done no good at all," she said one day despondingly, suspending her dusting to talk to the secretary; "it has only taught the girls to tie themselves in, and stick themselves out in the wrong places, and exchange their own slang for a worse. The real thing is bad enough, but an Islington version of it! I never knew before how dreadful a thing an imitation might be."

"Never despair," said Dick cheerfully, "the walls of Mrs. Brimble's new mansion are covered with pots and brasses; the great Jack is even bargaining for a Botticelli that is to be had cheap, and Mr. Papillon is the god of the family idolatry. That, at least, is your doing."

"Dick, I think you are very cruel," said Dinah, with a catch in her breath.

Dick looked up in amaze. The lady-help had her back towards him, but he noticed the droop of her head—that little comely head that was usually held so proudly erect.

"Why, Dinah," he said kindly, "I thought we agreed to take the new Brimble attitude as a joke."

"I suppose you don't think it a very amusing joke to be called Dismal Dick."

"Well, I don't mind awfully." He laughed with a shade of constraint. "I daresay I do look glum enough."

"But I mind!" She whirled round and flashed an indignant look on him. "What right has that odious little shop-keeper to speak of you like that?"

"It's a free country,"—Dick twirled a paper-knife; "he might have called me

pills or hair-wash, and that would have been a trifle more disagreeable. People who go in for a social crusade like ours must look for a few rubs by the way."

"Yes," said Dinah, with the tears shining in her bright eyes, "but I don't bargain to be elbowed out of my own set by Mrs. Brimble. I tell you, Dick, you would need to be a woman to understand what it is to be snubbed and sat upon by a person——"

"Whom you thought it your privilege to snub and sit on! She is too clever for you." Dick sat back in his chair and laughed heartily. "She is a very clever woman, and I've an immense admiration for her. She was bound to become a social success whether you gave her a lift or no. She is a triumphant example of the value of push."

Dick could see nothing but fun in this

new development, but Dinah, woman-like, felt sore. Ever since the affair of the bonnet Mrs. Brimble's horizon had widened and she had moved onwards steadily. She had taken a great house in the fashionable west, and had stormed society with a conspicuous success to which Mrs. Murray would never have attained if she had lived to give dinners and suppers till she was a hundred. Lord Heatherleigh graced all the entertainments of this new star, and the Hon. Evelyn, now Lady Heatherleigh, it was whispered, dictated all the invitations and selected the menu.

Mrs. Brimble as a lady of fashion was to Dick a delightful spectacle, and he would have gone a good way round to meet Jack—a feeble plagiarism of Mr. Bolde—in a Norfolk jacket and a Byronic collar, but Dinah did not like to be invited only to the “scratch parties,” as Dick

called them, and to have the girls pass her in the Park. As for Fanny, no words could sufficiently describe Fanny's strange behaviour.

"You were angry with me for associating with them, and now you are seen at all their parties," she said reproachfully.

"You must discriminate," said Fanny with her gentle drawl and that look as if she saw some one behind the person she addressed. "When I first saw Mrs. Brimble she was not received anywhere ; now she goes everywhere. It's a great thing to have an instinct for the right moment to act, Dinah ; it is what William and I are always wishing for you. Now, if you had waited a little while before encouraging that foolish young Mr. Savory to marry beneath him, you might have had credit instead of reproach, for since the Heatherleighs have noticed his wife Lady

Savory is reconciled to her son ; but she will always associate you in her mind with their quarrel."

Though she was provoked, Dinah was compelled to laugh.

"For a Botticellian Brother, Fanny, you are a very worldly person," she said.

On the whole she preferred Mrs. Brimble's push to her sister-in-law's tact, though each was equally successful in arriving at the end she had in view. The Heatherleigh-Brimble-Fanny-and-William faction carried all before it ; the entertainments were mentioned in the *Morning Post* ; it was said that everybody went to them, and after that all the best people left cards. Society accepted Mrs. Brimble and her fine furniture and her champagne without demur ; for the matter of that, the hostess counts for very little indeed, if her entertainments are good and if everybody

goes to them. But indeed Mrs. Brimble would not let herself be effaced, and she rightly valued the power of self-assertion. She drilled her meek husband into obedience, and when she spoke of Islington she let it be understood that it was some distant country where large fortunes were made. Some people thought her peculiar humour very engaging, though they preferred that their neighbours should be the subjects of it. Are not "the jests of the rich ever successful"?

"You are too kind, too good ever to succeed," Dinah said to Mrs. Murray; "there is no room for your kind of charity in the world. You want to make everybody happy, and you ought only to want to be amused yourself. To get on you must walk across the people who stand in your way. Mrs. Brimble's velvet boots do that quite successfully. The Sharmans were

inconvenient because they might have let out about Islington, and so they are dropped. Fanny does not tread on people or drop them because she never takes them up till everybody else has done so. Perhaps she makes the fewest enemies."

"Dinah,"—Mrs. Murray's kind face was a little saddened,—"Job wanted me to have the best; isn't there a better than this? It seems to me—you have seen a great deal more of the world and you know—but it seems to me hardly worth striving for only to reach this." She reviewed in her mind the scene she had just left, an At Home where the æsthetic element preponderated, and where the worst offence that could befall was a trespass against good taste. She had felt ill at ease in a world where there seemed to be no room for a single natural impulse of kindliness.

"Indeed—indeed there is," said Dinah

fervently ; "there are a few of your old friends and one or two of mine who care for us just for ourselves and not for anything we can give them. We will keep to them and not try any more to mend the world, for after all, we only hurt ourselves and do nobody any good. Dick was right ; we should not have had the same heart-break if we had begun much lower down."

This was a great admission for Dinah, and it could only have been made in a moment of depression. She had espoused the cause of the lower middle class with the purest intentions. She longed to place herself in sympathy with those young people who were so much like herself in everything but the place society yielded them, she had hoped that those who had had greater advantages would bend a little to bestow of their grace and culture, and

instead—the girls had picked up the worst faults of the new set and had engaged themselves to the wrong young men.

As for their brothers and cousins and lovers, she had done nothing but make them angry and jealous of those others of Dinah's old friends who were ready enough to amuse themselves with a pretty face wherever it was to be found. Dinah thought with a shudder of all those scowling youths whom she could not console, for ladies of the west were still very shy of her gatherings. There was a young man who had been plighted to Maria Brimble and who now saw himself hopelessly severed from her, since Maria aspired to nothing less than a lord of her own. There was a gentle little girl whose simple secret she had read, and whom, alas! she could not comfort; was it any wonder that the lady-help suffered a great many secret

stabs as she walked about the great lighted rooms, and that she felt that she had only wakened jealousy and envy and many other evil passions by her rash experiment? One mamma would scold because her girl did not get the right partner, and another was at a deadly feud with an old neighbour because of some stroke of luck that had fallen to the one and not to the other; these things, it is true, might have happened equally well in Islington, but since they befell in Bayswater it was on Dinah's shoulders that the burden of them lay. No wonder that she clasped her hands behind her back and cried that she would meddle with the ills of life no more.

Strangely enough, it was Mrs. Owen Challice who came to her aid. Dinah had been quite right about this beautiful lady; she had not been repulsed by her reception, and she came a great deal to her dear Mrs.

Murray's. She had not found the experiment of living with Lady Jane successful ; Lady Jane, it was said, rebelled at the long, limp curates who made a religion of thwarting the bishop, and had even urged on her the value of the confessional. After one disagreement, of which Mrs. Challice gave her own version, the ladies separated, and Mrs. Challice now lived alone. Dinah used to meet her sometimes in morning walks, coming from early service, and every time her curiosity was more quickened about her. She would have gone some distance out of her way rather than meet her, yet whenever they come face to face she felt that resistless desire to penetrate her motives and understand her true character.

She was very much afraid the first time Mrs. Challice proposed to lay aside her scruples and come to Mrs. Murray's At

Homes ; afraid she hardly knew of what, but chiefly of Dick.

"I suppose we must let her," Mrs. Murray said ; "you see, Job liked her."

"She would come whether we let her or not," Dinah said with a sense of hopelessness.

She did come, and from the moment she entered the room things seemed to go right ; the rough became smooth ; the discontented were appeased. She brought two ecclesiastical young ladies with her who seemed not averse from exchanging the church for the world, and Dinah began to be gladdened with smiles where she had only met with frowns. It was not love and charity that worked the spell—what was it ?

Every one was loud in praise of this new guest ; even the pretty girls were at once her friends. Perhaps it was that they

feared no rival in her, for she made herself equally charming to all, and her beauty, and the whisper that went round of her wealth and her great connections, not a little added to her interest. Dinah looked on in a kind of listless amaze.

“We are doing better to-night,” she said, finding herself near a little old man who had always been her friend.

“Yes,” he said, “yes, and I’m sorry for it.”

“Why?” she asked, flushing slowly.

“Look at that girl,” he said, by way of answer—“that girl in blue. She’s copied your gown and the way you do your hair, and she’s got your trick of speaking and moving; you’ve made her very nearly a lady, but you’ve made her too fine to help her father in the shop and her mother in the house. And there’s that other girl in pink; she was going to be married to a

young man in the cloth line, but he's not good enough for her now. He's not here ; he's away drinking somewhere, I daresay ; that's what it drives them to."

Dinah turned away with tears in her eyes. She was strangely subdued and disheartened. "I meant it for the best," she said.

"Never mind 'im," said a jolly voice in her ear. "'E was always a croker. After Maria Brimble ain't there hope for us all?" the speaker, a fat old lady, laughed with beaming good-humour. "You've succeeded there, miss," she said admiringly.

"Ah, do you call that success?" Dinah murmured, turning away. Had all her strivings ended in this—to people society with Mrs. Brimbles!

Dick, who had taken one of his plunges into the east and had been detained by a meeting there, was very late. Dinah had

almost given him up, and breathed freely at the thought that he might not come at all, when she heard some one near her say—

“There’s Don Dismallo,” and looking up she saw him in the doorway. Dick’s face was towards her, and she saw the flush on it and the brightness of his eyes. He was looking down on Mrs. Challice, who was talking to him in that soft persuasive voice of hers that won so many hearts. She wore a long trailing robe of lace and jet that set off her dazzling fairness to perfection, and though Dinah could not see her face she knew just the expression of beseeching wistfulness it wore, as if it said in words—“Pity me, for I have suffered much.” She saw, too, the look of hardness, and almost of repulsion, melt gradually out of Dick’s blue eyes, and something that seemed sympathy and indignation against

another creep into them instead. Had she come to steal Dick's heart, and was that why she made herself so gracious and winning? Dinah turned away with a contempt for the folly of all men. "They are all alike, all alike," she said, "and we—those of us who stoop to such wickedness—can make them believe what we choose." It was not till some time after that she learned that there had been a great rupture between the Heatherleighs and their kinswoman; Mrs. Challice's friends had an unfortunate knack of quarrelling with her, and she was telling Dick in her plaintive way what a cold, cruel place she found the world.

Dinah had a little trouble of her own to cope with that night. Since she had invited Mr. Papillon to join her crusade, he had been her true and faithful knight; he had not failed her on a single Friday, and he

had not fallen in love with any of the girls. Dinah had for some time guessed why this was so, and why faces that were prettier than hers, and fortunes that were larger, had no charm for him. When this light first came to her she grew rather shy of her poet, and avoided him when she could ; but Mr. Papillon would not be avoided. He treated her as a sort of comrade, to whom he came often for help and counsel. Were they not a pair of fellow-travellers in an unknown land ? Dinah bit her lip with vexation when she remembered that it was she who had at first lightly challenged him to explore this new world with her. Did he not deserve a reward—and yet—and yet—what was there for her to give him ?

She had kept out of his way all evening, and had pinioned him to an old gentleman who engaged him deeply on the question of Free Trade. But in that unguarded

moment when she stood watching Dick her fate came to her. She gave herself up with a sense that it was useless to struggle any longer. She passed her hand through Mr. Papillon's arm, and let him lead her as in a dream into the greenhouse. There among the sleeping flowers he told his story. He said it in few words, not at all as if he were making his confession in well-turned verse ; he was too deadly in earnest for that.

"Dinah, you must know," he said, "I have hoped for such a long time. Will you marry me?"

She looked up at him, and for the moment the temptation to yield was almost irresistible. She was very weary of her failures and if she married she might renounce the task that had proved too hard. She looked up into the face above her ; she knew that under his little conceits this

friend of hers concealed a kind heart ; she remembered the many things he had done for her ; he had kept away Mr. Merrit and hushed his evil tongue ; he had taken Mrs. Brimble off her hands—at the thought of that now prosperous lady she smiled. Mr. Papillon thought she was consenting, and he eagerly took her hand. But the touch seemed to waken Dinah out of her dream, and she drew her fingers gently away.

“ If I could,” she sighed restlessly, and then quickly she added, “ but I cannot.”

There was not in this hesitation much to uplift him, for love answers to love as the flint to the steel, but her very doubt gave him hope. “ Do not turn me away,” he pleaded, “ give me a chance ; I will go anywhere, do anything you command me. I am all yours ; you shall order the life we shall lead.”

Dinah listened vaguely. When he

ceased, and would have taken her hand again, she withheld it.

“I am thinking,” she said—“I am thinking what is best to do.”

She was looking down on a dim white flower that glimmered through the semi-darkness, but what she really saw was her lover's face. He was quite as vividly present to her as if she had lifted her downcast eyes and looked at him. She saw him—handsome beyond most men, and knowing it—there was nothing in that. He loved beauty in all things, and he could not ignore it in himself. She tried to think of herself as a part of his life; she knew that the world was wearying of æstheticism, and growing restive under the yoke of so-called culture; but she felt instinctively that for such an one as her friend there must always be some outlet for enthusiasm; if one cult languished

for worshippers, there were so many others to take its place. The temple she knew would be gracious and fair, and there was something in this kneeling attitude that for the moment had a most persuasive and restful charm. To strive and battle no more—just to shut one's eyes to the ugliness of life, and be subject to beauty.

She looked up and straight from her; she was wavering, yielding, when suddenly her glance fell on Dick. He crossed the lighted room beyond, his jaw square set, and a cloud on his brow. He had not even looked towards her, and he passed immediately beyond the limit of her sight, but in an instant she was conscious of a strong repulsion from her first feeling. The life she had pictured so full of peace seemed only a gilded and cushioned slavery.

"I cannot," she said quickly, "I must be free ; I cannot fetter myself."

Papillon's eyes instinctively followed the direction of her own, but he only saw Mrs. Challice bending and smiling as she listened—even at that moment of suspense he noted the gracefulness of her attitude. He would have urged his cause once more, but while he struggled for some word that would touch Dinah, she spoke again. Her tone was very gentle, but her decision had gathered strength. "I am very, very sorry," she said, "but I cannot do it. I must live my own life ; I tried to think it was not so, but it is. I must be free."

It was a great blow to him, but his instinct was fine enough to tell him that it was hopeless to press her. He stood aside and let her pass alone into the lighted room.

When the party had broken up, Dinah

escaped upstairs without waiting to discuss its success. As she passed the open dining-room door, she heard Dick say rather doggedly :

“I know where Challice is ; his wife has told me.”

“Dick,”—Mrs. Murray’s voice sounded troubled,—“I wish she had never come here ; I mistrust her somehow. Dick, my dear, think gently ; she must have made him very unhappy.”

“Most men are made unhappy by a woman,” he answered, and as Dinah fled, she thought Dick was dealing her a stab of reproach.

VI.

DINAH was playing softly to herself in the big drawing-room. It was morning—far too early for visitors ; and indeed the room was not in perfect order and trim. It was arranged as far as the housemaid's skill went ; but it yet waited those last discriminating touches which only the mistress can give. Dinah's duster was not needed, but her light fingers had moved the chairs to an easier angle, and she had noticed that there were flowers to arrange. She stood a moment looking at them—a great bunch of dewy sweetness, fresh from some country garden, massed and heaped in crude and vivid colouring. She turned up

the cuffs of her white dress, but after all she did not fill one of the long array of empty glasses ; she thrust the flowers into a bowl, careful only that their thirsty stalks had wherewithal to drink. She was too restless for so patient a task.

She crossed the room and opened the piano ; her thoughts seemed to marshal and order themselves as she played ; they set themselves to the vagrant airs that her fingers drew forth almost unconsciously ; now melancholy, now hopeful. June had come again ; June just a year ago had come back too, and the present and the past seemed to merge into each other, till, in spite of the music, she could hardly unravel them in her thought. "Old people talk of time as if it does everything," she said to herself with some youthful resentment—"withers faith and hope, and takes the pain out of love, leaving one a sort of

galvanised corpse with nothing to do but eat and sleep. Well, it hasn't done that for either Dick or Venice, and I think"—Dinah played very softly—"I think they would both of them rather suffer than buy ease at such a price." At the same moment she was illogical enough to hope that Mr. Papillon would speedily console himself; the poet unable to make poetry, and the æsthete unmoved by a new inspiration in dress was a keen and uncomfortable reproach to her.

The year that had wrought so many love problems had brought an heir to the Heatherleighs—"a Sunday's bairn, born to luck." Dinah hummed over the nursery rhyme as she thought of the announcement that had spiced the breakfast-table that very morning. The news of the birth would travel speedily northwards; there would be tremendous rejoicings; Venetia

would hear of the little heir ; perhaps she would go out at nightfall to see the hilltop crowned with joy-fires. That thought had been present with them all, though nobody spoke of it, and they had only made a jest of the old lord's pompous satisfaction.

"He will have all the legs of' the tables tied round with cotton-wool," said Dick, "in case the heir should want to fall against them."

"Babies don't walk the minute they are born, even though they are lordlings," Dinah had answered lightly, but she furtively watched Dick's face for his further thought. It was inevitable that the new heir should bring the old to mind—the heir who had been hated, and who was heir no longer. Since that night, a week or two ago, when she had heard Dick speak of Challice, Dinah had had an unspoken fear ; she did not formulate her

dread, but it took the shape of Dick's going away, and in his young heat and anger and sorrow lending himself to some unworthy act. Dinah's scorn of Owen Challice had lost its keen edge of late ; she still thought him weak ; weak to have yielded when he of all men should have been strong, but she had grown a little in the insight that brings sympathy, and it seemed to her that the struggle between passion and duty might not be so easy as she had once supposed. Not easy, but hard ; and to renounce !—ah, that might have an anguish of its own, of which she could only dimly guess. She stopped playing as she thought of these things, then she heard Dick's step crossing the room behind her.

“I thought you had gone out,” she said, not turning round.

“Not yet. I waited for this post.” He

came up and dropped one or two notes over her shoulder.

She took them up listlessly, and examined them without curiosity. "More invitations," she said. "Fanny is to have on her best gown and her best manners on Thursday, and the Beverleys are on show on Monday. Oh, Dick, I'm so tired of all this; I wish we could invent some happy excuse to go away."

"I must go away," he said.

She did not look round; she folded her hands tightly in her lap. "Not abroad?" she said, with an effort.

"Abroad? No—home."

Dinah wheeled round on her seat. She was thrillingly alive now to the pain in his voice. She put up her hands with the sleeves still turned back, and caught him by the wrists; her eyes as she looked into his were full of sympathy and pain.

“Oh, Dick,” she said, “what is it? What new trouble is coming to us?”

“Venice is ill.” His voice was hoarse, but he tried to steady it. “I don’t know how ill. Granny says I am not to fear, and she always speaks the truth.”

“Yes, oh yes,” Dinah echoed, “you may trust her for the truth. But you must go. Oh, I wish we could all go,” she said, unable to keep back the longing; it seemed intolerable to be always sending Dick away, and waiting for his slow tidings. It is the woman’s lot, but Dinah rebelled against it. “Let us all go to Edinburgh,” she said; “then we can be near you, Dick, if you should want us.” But Dick shook his head. He had not room for any plans in his mind except his own—how most quickly to get home.

“Venice is my friend too,” said Dinah a little tremulously, and somehow the words

reached Dick. He looked at Dinah, and seemed to be for the first time aware of the appeal in her face. Her eyes dropped slowly before his, and he said quickly :

“We must get Venice abroad ; it’s a change she wants. You must think of some place where we can all go, some sunny place where we haven’t been together before.”

Dinah gently drew away her hands, which he had taken, and rose. “There’s an afternoon train which you can catch,” she said. “It will land you very early, but you can drive out. You must have some lunch, and then I’ll send Jones for a cab.” She went away and left Dick. “There are always things to do,” she said to herself ; “sandwiches are the only things you’ve got to think of, Dinah ; and he does not know that I remember this day a year ago—in rose country——”

She took upon herself all the practical preparations. Mrs. Murray came upon her packing a little hamper; "It's some fruit," she said, looking up; "it is better here than they can get it."

"Did you go for it yourself?" Mrs. Murray asked wonderingly, noticing the hat and gloves Dinah had tossed on to the floor. "Why didn't you send Jones, or one of the maids?"

"She is ill," said Dinah in an indescribable voice, "she is very ill, and Dick is going to her."

So once more they sent Dick off and waited. As the cab disappeared Dinah turned and laid her hot cheek against Mrs. Murray's. There was a flush on it, and her eyes were very bright.

"Do you remember last time," she said, and she burst out laughing, "when Mrs. Brimble came and sat under the chandelier

and you and I offered incense to her? She will come to-day, but it will be to tell us about the Heatherleigh baby as if somehow the credit of it belonged to her."

"I remember Mr. Papillon taking her away," said Mrs. Murray, who wondered at many things in secret. "Do you think he will come to-day, Dinah?"

The lady-help did not answer this question. "Dick is taking life down to Venice," she said, and her voice was a little tremulous. "I know it, I know it; this time our boy will come back happy."

Dick did not share this pleasant belief as he flew towards the North. There was a long long piece of the summer day and a brief spell of the summer night spent on the journey, but to his heavy heart it was all night; he was sick of the bright pitiless June beauty, of the cold unsympathy of nature; it babbled of nothing but life, and

something told him that it was death towards which he was flying. The pearly dawn was struggling out of the soft gray night when he stumbled weary and half-dazed out of the train. It was a beautiful world if he had had eyes to see it, for now the east was flushing, and behind the castle ramparts and the city still sleeping below the rose-fire spread and deepened ; the far-off sea caught the light, and with this passionate colour ; with a strange throb and pulse of life the new day began.

Dick had no eyes for this morning miracle ; he woke a drowsy driver, and without resting or pausing to eat or wash, he flung himself into the cab and began his long drive. The day broadened and brightened every moment about him ; the sky hung a stainless blue over the city he had left behind, above the full-leaved summer woods and the white roads he was

now facing. He stopped the man at a little wood-path closed from the highway by a rustic gate, and directing him to leave the luggage at the lodge he pushed open the little door and took the narrow grass-grown track.

He felt the fresh crispness of the morning air invigorating, and the old sweet sense of familiarity stole into his heart like a cordial. The round green hills streaked with light seemed to greet him; he laid his hand on the smooth stem of a giant beech as if he were greeting a friend; it was his own world singing its unchanged morning psalm; it could not but bode him good; it dared not bode him ill.

When he neared the house he saw that the working world was awake. Cocks were crowing in lusty rivalry, a stable-boy was whistling melodiously, and he saw Nannie, the "derrie," tramping across the

meadow pail in hand and brushing the dew with her short skirts. Nevertheless he did not announce himself in the usual way ; he jumped the low fence and crept stealthily along the terrace, looking up furtively. Venetia's window was open, and the white curtain was fluttered by a passing breath of air. Somehow this open window revived his courage as nothing else had done. He crept on till he reached the corner : he knew a trick by which the library window could be opened from the outside in spite of elaborate precautions for the discomfiture of burglars, and soft as any thief he made his entrance.

There, an hour later, a startled maid coming in to sweep found him locked in that sound, dreamless, motionless sleep that in the young so strangely simulates death. Dick had flung himself on the rug with a big book for a pillow, and he slept

on unconscious of everything ; of the foot-steps that stole in by and by, and of Granny's kind sad face as she lightly spread a sofa-blanket over him.

It was not far from noon when he woke with a start and a confused wonder as to his whereabouts. That only lasted a moment, and then he remembered everything. He sat up leaning on his elbow and looked round the well-known room with its dim lining of books. His movement attracted some one who occupied the arm-chair near the table, and then Granny had risen and Dick had jumped up too, and their hands met. The sleep was hardly out of his eyes yet, but as he looked at her, noticing for the first time her widow's cap and the fast whitening bands of hair under it, he was struck by something in her look that made his heart contract. It was only the look that the

new life of loneliness had brought, but it made Dick's suspense seem all at once intolerable. How could he have slept while this great trouble kept others waking?

"You've been sitting up," he said, as if he had not realised before that there might be this necessity.

"My dear laddie, what a bed to choose!" she said with her old slow-coming smile. "Could not you trust us for a better pillow than the big dictionary?"

"I'm tough," he answered, feeling no ache in his young healthiness. "I never meant to sleep at all, I meant to keep quiet till breakfast time."

"Well, the breakfast has been ready this hour and more. Come and eat."

"Eat!" Dick burst out with a sudden sharp edge to his voice, "you think because I slept that I feel nothing! Granny, are

you deceiving me? Is she—is she dead?” the words came out as if in spite of his will.

Mrs. Arabin put her hand on his shoulder with a firm and yet gentle touch. She looked at him with sad motherly compassion in her eyes. “She is better, my dear, much better; if it had not been so you may be sure I’d have told you. When you have had breakfast you will go up and see her.”

Dick drew himself away from under her touch. In the fulness of his relief he was almost ashamed of his emotion.

“That’s what Dinah said,”—he smiled at the recollection;—“she said you were a woman of your word, and that’s a tremendous compliment from her! I’ll go and have a wash, and then you’ll give me some breakfast.”

The revulsion of feeling set his heart

dancing, and he felt a new outgoing of kindness towards everybody. It was like old times to be waited on while he ate, except that there was no sweet girlish face behind the coffee-pot to break into laughter at his schoolboy tales. When the laird came in, Dick read nothing but pleasure and content in his face. He slapped Dick on the back and rallied him in an eager sort of way on his coming.

"She's moping and she's caught a cold. It's nothing. She'll be all right now you have come," he said as he had said once before. "We must get her away for a change. Couldn't you get her to go and have a look at those sheep of yours, eh, Dick?"

Dick laughed and helped himself to marmalade. In his relief it seemed to him as if everything were going to be easy and pleasant, and the old days of happy love

come back again. To get Venice all to himself,—away upon the wide sea, away from the dark trouble of a year ago,—to carry her with him into the sunlight ; to love her back into life and happiness ; his heart throbbed with a keen delight that was almost pain. The dreams of the young are beautiful, but they are sad to the old, and Granny, while she ministered to him, looked at him with yearning in her eyes. To her it was only a dream that woke his blue eyes to smiles and his lips to the old light laughter, but she could not bear to shatter it yet.

“ Venice doesn’t know you’re here.” The laird had a newspaper under his arm, but he wandered rather restlessly round the table. “ You’ll go up and give her a surprise, my boy. She wants rousing ; she’ll think it a great joke you’re coming all the way from town to ask for her cold.

He laughed, and Dick did not or would not hear the forlorn edge in his merriment.

“Do you remember you promised Martin to go over to the Mains?” Mrs. Arabin reminded him.

“Eh? yes, yes;” he let his paper fall and stooped stiffly to pick it up. “I was thinking, Mary, the doctor will be here before long, and I can ride back with him. It will be company, you see,”—he looked doubtfully from the bright young face to the sad old one.

At the mention of the doctor Dick's heart fell, but only for an instant. Wasn't Venice ever so much better on Granny's word of honour?

When he stole up to her room to give her that surprise which was to be such a joke between them, he felt reassured. His inexperienced eyes did not contradict his hopes. He paused a half-shy moment in

the doorway ; Venice lay on a sofa near the open window ; she wore a loose white dress, he could not see her face which was turned towards the outer world, but he felt rather than knew that she did not sleep, though she lay perfectly still. There were none of the ugly signs of sickness to be seen ; nothing but the pleasant things that belong to convalescence ; books and flowers and her canary twittering in its big cage.

Dick crept in very quietly. He saw that her thoughts had travelled far away, and he was jealous of this unknown world where they wandered ; as he stood there, conscious of a cold shadow that was creeping over his happiness, she turned and knew him. She looked at him at first with abstraction in her eyes, and then, as recognition came slowly, with a smile and a flush of happy surprise.

“Why, Dick—oh, Dick, my bonnie

laddie, and did you really come all this way just to see me?" she whispered, as Dick got down on his knees beside her. It was a great joke, of course, but somehow Dick found no words, though an entire content stole over him as he felt Venice's hand on his curls.

"What made you go and get ill?" he said at last, with something of the old brotherly remonstrance in his voice. "You were never ill before, Venice; did you want a new experience, or was it a little petting and coaxing?" Oh fie, Miss Venetia! I believe it was all a sham, like the Sunday headaches of my youth."

"It was such a poor little illness that it wasn't worth shamming," she said, with her low laugh. "Only a little stupid tickle of a cough, not even a 'sair host,' which would have been a respectable sort of complaint, and would have made itself

heard, anyhow. I believe David thinks, like you, that I'm an impostor."

"David be—blowed," said Dick with a gulp. "Let me look at you," he said, lifting his head and surveying her eagerly.

She looked at him with a smile in her sweet eyes; they were candid eyes that never hid anything, and though they smiled, there was an abiding sadness in their depths. She was pale now that the flush awakened by seeing him had died away; and the hand he held seemed small and thin in his big broad clasp. His instinct was fine enough to tell him that she was somehow different, but whether it was sickness or something else that had wrought the change, he could not tell. He put his head down suddenly, rather blunderingly, against the framework of the sofa.

"Won't you come out, Venice?" he said. "It's a glorious day."

"I can't walk just yet, Dick, I'm afraid."

"I'll carry you," he said eagerly. "I'll do it awfully gently if you'll trust me. You only want to get out into the sunshine." It was his own healthy impulse always to fight his troubles out of doors.

She smiled at him. "You've carried me before. You look so strong, Dick." She put her white hand on his brown one and laughed.

"I'm as strong as I look," he said steadily, covering her hand with his other one as if the sight of it gave him pain. Venice's hand used to be brown and freckled once.

"You are different too," she said a little wistfully. She put out her free hand and touched his hair lightly. "We are growing old, Dick ; we are twenty-three."

"I am always just the same to you," Dick spoke a little huskily. "Old or

young, it makes no difference. Twenty-three is a lot, isn't it?"

"I used to think it meant the end of life, but I'm not sure now."

"We might make it the beginning together." Did Dick speak aloud, or was it only his heart that uttered it? There was silence between them for a little while and then he said suddenly :

"What have they done with your hair Venice?"

"Cut it off; it troubled me."

"Why wasn't I told?" he said sharply—he was thinking of her illness which he was only beginning to understand by little signs such as these.

"About my hair—my poor, pretty hair? Don't you remember I always longed to have it short like yours, to feel the wind blowing through it? I kept some of it for you. I want you some day to get it

made up into a bracelet—for Dinah. Oh, Dick," she said, of a sudden breaking down with a long sighing sob, "I wish I was strong, like you."

He put his arms about her and soothed her as he could. There was a terrible stricture at his heart. He had always been so splendidly well and healthy that he had no experience of his own by which to explain her weakness; her tears fell like flakes of fire on his heart. He tightened his clasp about her with a fierce vow that she should never slip from him; never drift away from him again. There was comfort to Venice in his brotherly strength and tenderness; in her weakness something of his full, warm-blooded vitality seemed to steal into her veins; it was rest to lean against him; she was little once more, and he was the big brother who took care of her. So thinking, and

wandering back into that untroubled childhood, she grew quiet. Dick held her closely; she was so still that a dreadful fear came knocking thickly at his heart. When at last he took courage to loose his hold enough to secure a glimpse at her face, he saw that she slept.

It was some days before Venetia was able to be carried out into the summer weather, and then it was indeed Dick's strong arms that took her there. This young giant was learning to be a surprisingly good nurse; love is a great quickener of the perceptions, and it taught him how to divine the young girl's needs before she expressed them even by a look. He wheeled her sofa into the sunlight or the shade; he arranged her cushions with a clumsy, kind hand, till Venice lifted her eyes to his and laughed in his face. Dick could not always join in the laugh with

some poor, half-sad, little jest that served its turn; there was to him something inexplicable, mysterious, frightening in sickness; he was such a splendid young animal that he had never lost a night's sleep from pain of body, though he had known what it was to have his soul wrung and bruised. Even then it had been a fight and a struggle, and in the end the sound body had conquered the sick mind. As he took Venetia's hand of a morning, and saw it lie so white and slim and listless in his own, he used to wonder with a cold dread creeping over him why she didn't get better. There was nothing to hinder her getting well; the cough that she had smiled at as such a little one hardly troubled her; the summer, which is always reluctant in the north, had ceased its delays and come with a rush and burst of beauty, and she who so loved this familiar world which it crowned and

transfigured, lay and looked at it all with dreamy eyes. There was no reason in the world why she should not drink in health out here in the weather, unless—— Dick never finished that sentence to himself; he strangled it with a quick turn or two up and down the terrace, and came back to Venice's sofa to see if there was nothing more he could do for her.

To others of the household it seemed as if everything went well from the day Venice came downstairs. Her father took comfort in his newspaper once more, and looked over its rim now and then with broad content at the two who were always together.

"I knew the boy would come back," he said to Mrs. Arabin; "I let him take his own way, but I knew he'd come back. I think the lassie was just wearying for him; she's better every day since he came.

There will be no more talk of his going now, Mary."

"No," said Mrs. Arabin, "I don't think Dick will be in a hurry to go;" but though her words echoed his, her thoughts were very different.

Where he saw only sunshine and a peaceful age, made happy by the young folk's happiness—Dick his right hand, and by and by the master here, in the old place he loved—she saw a future that was blank only because she refused to face its possibilities. How much she knew, and how much more she divined by her woman's instinct, she never told; she was sure of nothing but that Dick was unchanged, and she felt an irrational, foolish longing at times, that he had been less faithful—as if faithfulness were not a rare and beautiful grace!

Everybody left the boy and girl much

alone, and it came about that Dick did nothing away from Venetia's side.

"What are you doing?" she asked him one day, seeing him twirling a pen absently.

"I'm writing to Dinah," he answered, glad of an excuse to break off.

"Is Dinah so difficult to write to? You've been biting your pen for the last half-hour."

"Then it's your fault, for I'm writing about you."

"What are you saying about me? I've a right to know."

"I'm telling her to send the next lot of grapes to me, for you never offered me one off the last bunch. Dinah doesn't know what a humbug you are; if she were here she'd have you up to the moor to feel the wind blowing in your face. Do you know it is showing purple already?"

"Do you think she wants you back, Dick?" Venice asked, with a hint of anxiety in her voice.

"Not she!" He stretched out his long legs with an air of content. "It's a grand opportunity for Dinah and for the beggars and the bagmen. I believe by this time she and Mrs. Brimble have had a stand-up fight; nothing but the fear of me kept them from it before."

"You—oh you silly boy!" She laughed at him softly. "Do you think you could keep two women from quarrelling if they wanted to? Is it about Mr. Jack Brimble?" she asked.

"About Jack!" Dick's obtuse masculine perceptions did not help him to understand this question. "It's more likely about your old friend the Laird of Cockpen. We all love a lord."

“Not Dinah. You don't know anything about it, Dick.”

“Well, not much,” he admitted. “I think Mrs. Brimble very good fun, but Dinah doesn't seem able to take her humorously.”

“Neither would you if you were a woman. Dick, what about the poet?” she asked, with an eager interest. “Dinah's friend, Mr. Papillon.”

“Apollo,” said Dick, with twinkling eyes, “has invented a new fashion of clothes; if you had been considerate enough to give me time, Venice, I'd have given you a chance of criticising them in my own person. Not to plagiarise Mr. Papillon is to argue yourself unknown. He has also written an elegy on ‘Despair in Love,’ and, like other heart-broken poets, has taken care to print it.” Dick was hard on this other lover,

who could find contentment in a new necktie.

“Oh, if he’s consoled himself with his tailor and printer——” she broke off with a half-wistful satisfaction. “I’d like to see Dinah,” she said slowly.

“So you shall. Dinah is finding a vent for her energies in making plans for foreign travel. As every new place she discovers is infinitely better than the one before it, we’ll come to the perfect place at last, and then we’ll take a family ticket for it. So, Miss Venice, your days of playing invalid are numbered.”

“You are going to take me away;” her colour rose and fell, and she looked troubled. “Oh, Dick,” she said, with a sudden throb in her voice, “not to Venice, not to Venice!”

“No, my dear,” he answered gently, “not to Venice.”

"Mamma died there—poor, little young mamma! Dick, if you take me there I think I shall die too."

"No, no, no," cried Dick, with fierce resistance. "You forget; it was life, not death, that it gave us. You and I were born there, and I—look at me;"—he threw out his chest as if he scorned his strength,—“and you—you were never ill before, Venice, and you're getting better now."

There was a cry in his voice that reached her. She turned on her pillow so that he could see her face, which she had hidden. "Oh yes, I'm getting better," she said wearily, "but I don't think I want to go away at all, unless——" She rose on her elbow, and looked at him with flushed earnestness. "Do you think it would make me well quicker if I went away somewhere, Dick?"

"Yes," he said, his hope speaking for him.

"Then I'll go ; I want to get well," she said eagerly.

But after that she did not make progress. She even fell back a little. The weather broke suddenly, and with that curious and subtle harmony there is between the life of our soul and the world of nature, she seemed to grow dejected, and droop with the flowers and trees on which the storm was beating. "It's the weather," they all said, and Dick would tap the barometer fiercely, as if his hopes all hung upon its rise.

One night Mrs. Arabin met him in the corridor. She wore her dressing-gown, and carried a shaded light ; she was going to sit up with Venice, who had been restless and feverish all day, but she had not wished her intention to be known ; she had

waited till the house was quiet, and here was Dick prowling about like a strong substantial young ghost, trying not to creak the boards as he went on his shoeless walk.

"Granny," he said miserably, "when is she going to get better?"

"Give her time, my dear," said Granny kindly; "you've been so strong, Dick, you don't know what illness means."

"Illness—if that were all! Is it all?" he began fiercely, "or is it——" He broke off as suddenly as he had begun, and turned away. "I'm going to sit up," he said; "will you come and tell me how she is?"

"Don't make your life longer by watching, Dick—there's no need. Go to bed."

"I can't," he said shortly, moving away.

He walked about for a time in the darkened passage; a little twinkle of light burned at one end of it like a star; at the

other end there was an unshuttered window set in the thickness of the wall, with a broad low sill that served as a seat. He crept there by and by, and stretched himself upon it, his head against the panelled shutter. The night was profoundly dark ; the darkness seemed to creep up and blot out the world. Dick sat as if compelled to stillness by the silence outside ; he sat and waited for Granny to come to him.

She came to him, as she had promised, as the day was breaking ; summer had come back in the dawn—the summer weather that was to make Venice well. The light, pearly and clear, was creeping in at the window already, and it fell on Dick's shut eyes ; Dick was sleeping, and never saw it. He had meant to wake, but youth and sorrow and silence had been too much for him.

Again, as on that first day, Granny stood

beside him and looked half-enviously at his profound repose. She did not rouse him, but she stooped, and, gently parting the hair on his brow, she kissed him.

“Poor Dick,” she said, “poor Dick.”

VII.

THE hills which we have seen so green, "sonsy," and smiling, have a grandeur of their own in storm—in such storm as sometimes visits them in August; when the sheep-shearing is over, the corn has been gathered in the valleys, the moor made glorious in purple, and everything is humdrumly peaceful, now and again nature turns restive, and breaks out as if to astonish the English strangers who patronise her at this season.

In such a weird hour a traveller came back who had known them only in sunshine, or in the gray, demure melancholy—not sadness—which is their best charm.

He stood high up on one of the round-backed bare slopes, heedless of the wrathful rain that pelted him with great hissing drops, and of the wind that tore past him in wild gusts, and nearly lifted him off his feet. He hardly knew their power, or felt them only as in keeping with, and a part of, his own immense dreariness.

Far below him, like a whiter blot upon the gloom, he saw a house looming cheerlessly out of the mists ; it was this that he had come across the seas to look at, those little pepper-pot turrets, those thick walls built for the ages ; we pay this sort of sentimental homage to the homes of people whose memories we hallow chiefly because they died a long time ago ; but this man had come to look on the scene of his own poor little tragedy, not yet grown cold. Over there, under the wild gloom of the sky, in an opening of the hills through which

Claverhouse's dragoons once stormed, he had bidden good-bye to love—to the best love he should ever know “on this dull side of death.” A year ago—a poor little year ago. Time is slow in helping some of us, and twelve months had not done very much for Owen Challice. He had stopped struggling, but he was bruised and faint with the combat. Where was Venice now? Not here, not here; the empty desolation would have told it if he had not known that she had gone.

He stood a long time on the height to which he had climbed; the hills were tossed about like the billows of a heaving ocean breaking out of the sullen valley mists. The wind swept past him in terrible gusts, and at these times he had much ado to keep himself from being carried away in its embrace; there is something eerie in the power of the wind

in these high latitudes ; it is a god or a demon ; everything shudders and quails before it. Some way off, in a hollow where the rain had not yet beaten it flat, Challice could see the long grass rolling like a riotous sea, beating and breaking against a dyke at the farther end. Between these sudden onslaughts of imprisoned air there were awful dead pauses of silence ; that intense silence where there is neither bird, nor beast, nor voice of any creature to take the mind from it. He could see the burns foaming white down the corries, but he could not hear their babble ; it was no day for sportsmen to be abroad ; the very sheep had vanished ; the eerie loneliness, the solitude, the wild emptiness of earth and sky between the bursts of storm gradually had such an effect upon his nerves, that he could have shouted aloud just to hear his own voice ; he hung upon the first wail of

the wind gathering its spent forces for a new rush ; its demoniac shriek, and howl seemed somehow to ease his oppressed heart ; it was the voice of his own pain carried out into the world.

He had wandered here and there during these twelve months, carrying everywhere his trouble with him ; he had "tholed" it—that was all ; the overcoming was not yet. He took his life that seemed so maimed and useless into all sorts of gay places. Paris, whose festive lightness had once before very quickly consoled him ; Italy, where the restless, thronging, gossiping southern life steals like a charm into many a heart and heals its ache. It would not do. At Paris he laughed at himself rather mirthlessly sometimes ; he used to feel himself lagging behind the gay, hard, brilliant pageant like a bird that has broken its wing and must trail it on the ground,

while its companions fly. In Rome a worse melancholy fell on him ; a mocking sense of meanness and shabbiness oppressed him ; the romance was stale and insipid ; the ruins seemed to try consciously to trick him into illusion, but they had lost their cunning spell, and the old gods looked at him in sad, stony wrath, because he could no longer believe. In Pompeii—poor little Pompeii, that shrinks and looks so small the second time one sees it—he felt as Diomed's ghost might feel, could he wander back along the avenue of tombs to the scene of his tragic death, and find it echoing with the empty jests of cockney tourists.

It would not do. In Rome he met some friends—he had friends everywhere, and they whirled him about with them—to gardens, museums, shopping, balls. In truth they found him very dreary ; some

distorted whisper of a private marriage had reached them, and they had immediately a theory to fit his dulness. No doubt he had mated some woman beneath him, and was repenting the folly.

"Whether you marry or don't marry," quoted one who was cynical, "you are equally sure to repent of it." A girl of the party, who was bolder than the rest by right of her being a beauty, asked him one day about this mysterious wife.

"Why don't you introduce us to Mrs. Challice?" she said; "we should like awfully to know her."

"Mrs. Challice lives in London," he answered coldly; "you will no doubt meet her when you go there."

"Will you introduce her to us then?" his questioner went on with daring flippancy, but his gray eyes, usually so quiet,

flashed in a way the beauty did not like, and she asked no more.

It was while with these gay people, though hardly of them, that he one day heard casually of Venetia Dundas. An ancient Roman countess, who had been in Scotland in those far-off days when everything of Italy was still hot in the laird's memory, and who had kept up a spare and straggling correspondence which died away and lived again spasmodically, told him of a letter that bore news of a family exodus. The laird's Italian was rusty from long disuse, and she could make out little, in fine, but that they had left the North—that cold, inhospitable North—she went through quite a little pantomime of shivers and shrugs at the thought of it—and had gone away, for health, perhaps, or for pleasure ; who could say ? Only not to Italy, of that she was sure ; not to gracious Italy.

Chalice hung on this old lady's words as if she dropped pearls and diamonds; her withered memories so grotesquely travestying the Scotch hospitality he knew so well; her little foolish stories of Venetia's babyhood stirred him strangely. It was the first time in all these months that he had heard her name, and it seemed to bring her living presence before him. Once again she was saying good-bye to him on the sad hillside with such burning tears as never flow twice in a lifetime, and duty like death had stepped between them.

He did not hear the old dame as she babbled of other things that were of more abiding interest to her; he was leaning on the window shutter, his glance mechanically noted the flash of the Barbarini fountain as it leaped in the light, but he was seeing the while those faithful eyes that denied the tears to smile on him and bid him be brave.

Was the love that should know no earthly close to make him less worthy ?

“ We are going to Tivoli,” said a saucy voice in his ear ; “ the only original Tivoli. Will your serene highness be pleased to go with us ?” He turned and saw the young daughter of the family he had joined ; he looked at her speculatively ; she was pretty, dark-eyed and red-lipped, no older than this other young girl he was thinking of ; pretty and lively, but her piquancy was of the earth, earthy.

“ I am going to England,” said Challice, his eyes still full of his mind’s vision ; “ I leave to-night.” His resolve came to him full-grown when he looked at the young girl’s saucy smiling face.

She dropped him a mocking curtsy. “ How charmed Mrs. Challice will be,” she said. “ She has been so patient. What long holidays she lets you have !”

"*Bon Dieu!* married people are not always together," cried the countess with a society laugh.

"So it would seem; I should like a better regulated husband for my part," cried the girl, piqued by Challice's profound indifference. This time his quiet eyes did not flash; he was not thinking of her at all, indeed; he was only saying to himself, "I am going home."

He travelled night and day with an eager restlessness that urged him on to what end he knew not, and, as in a dream, he found himself at last standing on the hillside wrapped in storm looking down on Venetia's forsaken home. He had pledged himself to see her no more; she was not here, but in some sunny land where he prayed that his shadow might not cross her thoughts "too sadly for their peace;" he wished with all his heart's fervour that

she might be happy and leave the pain to him.

There was a patch of firwood to which in a pause of the storm he climbed ; the sparse stems hardly yielded him any shelter ; they leaned forward as if the fury of winter had bowed their proud heads. They had a scared, supplicating look to him, as they stretched their long lean arms to the sullen sky ; he crouched down in front of a bleached boulder that rose among them, and watched the golden braken and the dusky bloom of heather beaten and tossed by the wrathful gusts ; there was a foxglove that had seeded itself at the root of the rock ; alone of all things it was unmoved, its fragile peal of bells intact against the secure background. He looked at these things, waiting. He was conscious now of a set purpose ; when the tempest lulled a little he took his way steadily downwards

towards the house that faced the valley ; it drew his steps like a magnet ; Venice was not there, but he could not keep away.

He got to it at last, leaping the fence and taking the familiar illegitimate short-cut by the terrace. So far all was the same ; the Psyche dripped chilly in the rain, the garden on which she looked lay wasted and sodden ; when he came to the front door it was shut. He had never known it shut before, and when he rang, the bell seemed to echo with a hollow long-drawn sound that reverberated in his heart. It was a long time before he heard David's slow step within, and his canny hand undoing the fastenings. The old man revealed himself at last ; he swung the door open impressively ; he wore an air of defence and almost of resentment against this bold intruder which did not change immediately.

"What's your will?" he asked suspiciously, surveying the sodden figure before him.

"Don't yqu know me?" Challice asked, taking off his travelling hat, and pushing back the damp hair from his brow.

"Preserve me!" said David, throwing the door wider, "it's the Englishman, and me barring the door as if it was a thief! Who would have thought o' a visitor on sic a day. Come in by, sir, come in by; you're as wet as if ye had been docket in the burn."

"I won't come in," said Challice, "I— I heard the family was from home."

"Every soul of them," said David; "but hoots! ye'll no stop out in the rain for that. There's a fire in the laird's room; come ben and get dried a wee."

Challice resisted no more. He followed David, busy with his own astonishment,

across the hall with its familiar medley of stuffed birds, old armour, and foreign views, to the dim room with its gray lining of books.

"I garred the lass light a spunk o' fire for the books," David was saying as he bustled about. "The laird sets great store by the books; the soft weather's awful bad for the cawf. Sirs! but ye're docket! Ye'd better take off your coat a wee, sir, and let me wring the wet out of it."

Chalice yielded mechanically; the laird's great leather chair was drawn up to the fire, and David, jingling the cellar keys, went off on hospitable intent. He stood and looked about him as one who dreams and lives over again a long past happiness.

At any moment it seemed as if the door might open and Venice come in; not the Venice of that last sad time, but the young girl who laughed and was blithe and gay.

“Ye are looking ill yoursel’, sir,” said David, coming back with a tablecloth over his arm and casting a scrutinising glance at his visitor.

“I am well—quite well,” said Challice absently.

“You’ll have missed the coach, I’m thinking,” David went on, trying ‘to account for the stranger’s forlorn condition, “or maybe ye walked from the station ; it’s a weary road on a wet day.”

“Yes, I walked,” Challice roused himself to answer. He let old David wander on through his maze of wonderings, and he replied to his many questions as best he could. It struck him at last that this cross-examination served some further end than the satisfaction of curiosity. David talked more than his wont ; was it because he did not wish to be questioned in his turn ?

"Is it long since they—the family left?" Challice asked at last.

"It's a month come Monday."

"And do you never feel lonely?" he asked, himself oppressed with a great sense of desolation.

"Whiles," said David laconically, and then he added slowly in the broad vernacular he dropped into when moved. "Folk maun thole muckle they have little will to thole in this world."

"And Mr. Fraser"—Challice brought the words out with an effort—"did he go with them?"

"Yes, sir; they sent him word when Miss Venice first turned ill, and he came down from London as fast as train could bring him."

"Ill?" Challice started up in his chair and looked at the speaker keenly. "You never told me she was ill."

"It'll no mend for the telling," said David turning away with a sorrowful action that spoke for itself.

"Is it—is it for that they have gone to France?"—Challice's lips were dry and his voice sounded odd even to himself—"to make her better? Say she is better!" he demanded fiercely.

"She'll never be better." David put up his hand furtively to his eyes. "She's weak of a decay, and she'll just slip away like her mother before her. I'm an auld man and she's but a bairn, but I'll never see her more."

"It's false," said Challice violently, seizing David by the arm and shaking him roughly; "you think it a fine jest, no doubt——" He stopped, sickening at his own words, and his grasp of the old man's arm relaxed. "For God's sake, say it's not true," he added sharply. David

stood before him patient and silent, he swept the crumbs away with his napkin, but his hands trembled a little as he set the glasses and dishes even.

"I would gie all these gray hairs—I would make the niffer, sir, wi' a licht hert—my auld head for her young one, if it lay wi' me," he said brokenly. Then he drew himself up and set about his work; he was the old, trusted, respectful servant once more. "You'll take a drop more of the sherry-wine, sir," he said, "it'll keep out the rheumatics."

"Leave me for a little." Challice waved the old man away with a passionate need for solitude. He sat stiff and motionless on his chair, his eyes vacantly fixed while he recalled the old servant's sorrowful phrases. "Dying—never coming back!" it could not be. The words broke the spell of his horror and he started up and

began to pace the room. It was folly—an old man's superstitious fears ; because the mother had died young the child must follow her—"a doom on the old house ;" he laughed strangely to himself as he thought how easily such a ban might be conjured up. He thought of Venice in her gracious youth and beauty ; of the young roundness of her cheek and the light in her eyes—those beautiful eyes that either in joy or sorrow were like no other eyes he had ever seen. All that he had known in his whole life of tenderness and goodness he associated with her ; the sight of her, and not less the memory, moved him as nothing else moved him ; she had touched the spring of a better life within him ; he had believed in nobleness, in renunciation, for her sake ; and to tell him now that he must live without even the poor consolation that they breathed God's

common air, and walked this world though always apart yet together—it could not be ; it could not be !

He began to feel the heat of the glowing fire oppressive. The food and wine he had taken had strengthened his body only as it seemed that he might suffer the more. He felt as if the room with its associations would stifle him ; better the storm-blast and the bleak hillside than this numbing comfort with its paralysing memories. Drawing on his coat, which was now dry, he left money for the old man on the table and stole to the window whose trick he knew. He opened it noiselessly and stepped out. The storm, which had abated for a little, was rising again into fury. There are so many of us, and our needs are so divergent, that poor old mother nature can never be in accord with us all ; perhaps she damped some

young heart's joy that day while she seemed to lend herself so sadly to one man's blinding sorrow.

That same night Challice left his hotel in Princes Street, and calling a cab drove to Roe Street. He had remembered the stately white-haired old lady who had asked him to come again and visit her ; he was not bent on hearing of the old times now, but he turned to her eagerly as to a refuge from his oppressed thoughts ; she was wiser than poor old David, and she could dispel his fears.

The little maid, who answered his summons with such alacrity that he felt she must have been lurking behind the door, stared at him, taken aback. She had expected a maiden lady with a cap-basket, a pinned-up gown, a pair of goloshes, and a shawl over her head, and the sight of a gentleman in evening dress was scaring.

"Is Mrs. Grant engaged?" Challice asked, remarking her embarrassment.

"Please, sir, she's having a tea-party," said the little maid. "Please, sir, will you walk in?" She gazed at him with round eyes, mentally counting the tea-cups.

He followed his guide up the narrow stair, making her understand that he wished to speak with her mistress alone. He was shown into the dining-room where the feast was spread; he felt like a conspirator coming to mar these gentle proceedings; as he crossed the lobby he ran against a lady in dishabille, who fled with a scream. There was a savoury odour of hot buttered toast and tea in the air; he looked about him at the old family portraits on the wall, short-waisted smiling ladies with high loops of hair, and very long-waisted gentlemen with answering simpers.

From the place of honour the beloved Prince looked down ; there was an old rusty blade, unsheathed in one of his forgotten battles, beneath the picture, and a branch of sere laurel hung above it ; he remembered with hardly an added pang that far-off day when roses had been gathered for this hero's crown.

There was a little scuffling and confusion in the lobby as of ladies who spoke with bated breath, but Mrs. Grant came in calm and majestic ; it was not possible to associate any of the whispering with her. As Challice looked at the serene face under its widow's cap he felt a rush of comfort and hope. He began to apologise for his intrusion, but she stopped him with a white old hand laid on his.

" You are most welcome," she said, cordially ; " and I take it kind of you to come and see an old woman. A few of

my friends are taking tea with me ; you'll please us all by joining us."

He refused hastily. "I came," he said, "because I was anxious to hear from you of Miss Dundas." He felt as this old lady looked at him with her keen calm eyes that he could not go about the matter with any explanation or poor extenuation ; his whole need came out in his voice. "I heard that she was very ill, and I came to you to be told that it was not true."

She searched his face gravely. Perhaps she had heard some whisper of his story and was comparing it with another weird that had been dreed long ago. "It would be no kindness to deceive you," she said ; "she's ill, but as for being past hope, if that's what they told you, that I never will hear. She's young, my dear,"—she put her hand with a motherly touch on his shoulder ; he might have been her son,—“and youth

doesn't give in without a struggle. And she's in good hands, for though I think little of these foreign doctors myself, Mary Arabin's a born nurse. And between you and me—though it's maybe heresy to say it in this well-doctored town—it's the nursing that cures."

"Then you think there is good hope," he said eagerly.

"Hope!" she said, with a touch of scorn. "I would hope till I saw her in her grave-clothes if it was me—aye, and maybe beyond that."

"Thank you," said Challice, and while he lingered as if for some further word of cheer the door opened and Miss Sparling's head, gaily set out with flowers, appeared.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but your Mary Ann told us it was Mr. Challice." She let her body in gradually, and he dimly recognised the lady whose dis-

habille he had surprised. "I'm sure I hope we're not intruding, but Miss Betsy Pollock and I——"

"Come in, come in, Betsy Pollock," said Mrs. Grant; "and you too, Henrietta Honeywood. Mr. Challice came on a little matter of business, and I'm glad I've been able to help him." She looked at the young man as if she would say, "Take courage; never despair."

"We thought," began Miss Susan Pollock timidly, her voice coming mysteriously from behind the other ladies, "that we ought to congratulate——"

"To condole, you mean, Miss Susan," said Miss Sparling with asperity. "Dear, dear, to think of an old man like that marrying again, when he should rather have been thinking of his end. And not a sensible, responsible woman" (she looked round her as who should say, "One

of us, for instance"), "but a silly glaiket lassie! He might better have wedded one we know of, though she, poor soul, will never be kirked by earl or commoner."

Challice looked from one face to the other, in his bewilderment unable to follow their argument.

"It's the baby. To think that you should be cut off by a screaming wean—it's affronting!" said an explanatory voice.

"Oh, my little cousin?" said Challice, absently—"the little heir. He's a sturdy fellow, I'm told, though I haven't seen him myself. He will wear his honours lustily if he keeps to his present promise."

There was a little murmur from one lady to another. Miss Susan Pollock thought this a beautifully humble speech, but Miss Sparling characteristically detected its hollowness. "He would do for a play-actor," she said, with a sneer, "why

can't he say he hates the bairn, like a good Christian !”

Challice escaped, he hardly knew how, from the pieces of wool-work and of knitting ; the gay caps, the hot tea and toast ; the tongues that were busy with idle tittle-tattle, while a young girl lay fighting with death on the other side of the sea.

VIII.

ONE summer day a yacht folded its white wings in the ancient seaport of Dives, on the coast of Normandy. The little group of people on deck, whom it had borne blithely across the dancing strip of waters, immediately engaged in the pleasant bustle of getting ready for shore. Those of them who had borne the sea's pleasantries well took kindly enough to the change, and those whom the waters had mocked and buffeted—what a blissful haven was this little harbour to them!

There was a sofa on deck on which a young girl wrapped in furs was lying: the wind ruffled her hair and brought a

colour to her pale cheeks. To her Dinah Kenyon, coming up the cabin steps, made her way.

"Well," said Dick, looking up from the head of the sofa, and laughing at her sallow cheeks, "do you feel like William the Conqueror now that we are on his own ground?"

"I feel like Dinah the conquered," said Miss Kenyon, with depression. "Venice," she continued, severely, "you look disgustingly and shamelessly well; I believe it was you who incited Dick to mock me with offers of food as I lay groaning on the cabin sofa; I thought once or twice with acquiescence of going to the bottom, but the wish to scold Dick kept me alive."

"Scold him if you like, but don't breathe a word against the *Edina*. She is quite perfect."

"It's a good thing she's of modest

tonnage," said Dick ; " what a hole of a harbour ! "

" Wasn't it good of Lord Heatherleigh to lend her to us ? It feels quite grand to have command of one's own ship. "

" See what it is to have an earl for a " well-wisher ! " When I marry an earl I shall not insist upon a yacht," said Dinah. " I'll let you have the glory of the *Edina* to yourselves going home. You may embrace the channel by the waist, but I'll take her round the throat in future. "

" Well, sea-sickness does make a fellow look rather ridiculous," said Dick with the easy contempt of perfect health. " You look after Venice, Dinah, while I see to the luggage. "

Dinah knelt down by the sofa and looked at her friend with eyes that softened into love. " I haven't seen you since we got on board," she said, " only yesterday,

was it? it looks like a year! But I am not as bad as Mrs. Murray"—she laughed—"and I hadn't a sea character to keep up; I haven't voyaged from Australia."

"Where is she?" asked Venetia.

"Your father is administering champagne in the cabin to her and Mrs. Arabin, and Parker is collecting the things that danced about so fiendishly all last night. There was my waterproof that swung on its peg as if it rejoiced at my misery, and a pair of boots that skipped with the most shameless glee. I had to watch them as if it were part of the penalty."

"You missed the march of the stars," said Venice softly; "Dick and I saw them. The padre meant to keep awake, but he slept, you know, wrapped in his big cloak, and it seemed as if we two were alone in the world. It made me think of a time when we were little children; we lost

ourselves ; it was quite near home and not so late as it seemed to seven years old, but there were the stars above us, and the emptiness all round, and the sense of helpless aloneness."

"You will get well here,"—Dinah's voice vibrated strangely—"you will get well and strong ; if Dick has you his world will be full enough."

"Dick will always have some one," said Venice with a smile that hurt the listener somehow.

"You will like this place?" she said as eagerly as if some living hope hung on the answer.

Venice let her eyes wander beyond the little port—sheltering their own yacht and nothing else besides but a fleet of brown-sailed fishing boats—to the long sweep and curve of the coast with its low-sloping background and its dotted white line of

houses. The sun lit up the blue above and beneath and turned to gold the girdling belt of shining sand.

"It's like another Portobello with the bonnie Fife hills and the Bass Rock left out," she said musingly.

Dinah laughed with a relieved note. "There's a good omen about the name, and if it reminds you of anything Scotch it will do," she said. "Here comes your father with orders for the shore. This kiss for good-bye, Venice, and this afternoon I will pay you a visit in your Portobello."

She moved away to prepare Mrs. Murray for the perils of the little boat that was to carry them ashore, for the voyagers were to separate for a time. Mrs. Murray had discovered that the loneliness of her Bayswater mansion would be insupportable without the young people's company, and when she read the yearning in Dinah's

eyes to be with her friend she at once set her heart on gratifying her. "It makes no odds," she remarked in her homely way ; "one place is as good as another, and Job would like this better."

Dinah knew that no place is so good as Scotland to a native of it, and she was grateful for this little concession. She remembered a quaint hostelry at Dives where she had once spent an hour or two, and she had written to secure rooms for herself and Mrs. Murray there. It was in every way the best arrangement, for the turreted villa which Dick had engaged for the season at Beuzeval would hardly accommodate more than the little band who had come as a matter of course to watch over Venetia's recovery. No one seemed to question Dick's right to make one of the household in the turreted villa ; his secretaryship had slipped off him as if he had never worn

its cares, and he was the Dick of old days—Venice's brother and Mr. Dundas's son.

Dinah was thinking of these things as she leaned over the wooden balcony of the "William the Conqueror" and looked down on the courtyard of the inn. The door of the room behind her stood open, and she could hear Mrs. Murray bemazing herself over the carpetless wooden floors, and the ridiculous pretension of the red velvet furniture, while Parker wrestled with the chambermaid's provincial French. She looked about her with immense content ; there was a spice of Bohemianism in the surroundings that gave them a double value in her eyes. The inn is old, built irregularly round a courtyard thronged all day with wheeled things of every size and shape, for the fame of the salles, redecorated after an ancient pattern with bric-à-brac

coloured glass, and weather-stained oak, and rescued from vulgarity by the gracious memory of Madame de Sevigné, attracts many visitors. These are for the most part passers-by, however, who come and eat, stare and depart; those who remain are chiefly artists and literary folks of the simpler order, who love a homely life when they have the good luck to fall on it.

"Mrs. Brimble will never come here," said Dinah, watching a flight of white pigeons settle like a snowfall on the opposite roof. "Thank heaven, we are not genteel. Even if rumour of the yacht should bring her, it is Houlgate she will go to. She will leave Beuzeval in peace, and Dives will never know her."

Dinah, too, was anxious to evade the past, and escape for a little from her self-imposed obligations; the thought of London left behind made the blood brisk in her

veins. No more angry mammas ; no more scowling lovers ; no more struggles with coloured fashion-plate young women——

“Dinah,”—Mrs. Murray’s voice sounded plaintively across her congratulations,—
“Dinah, my dear, do you think they mean us both to wash in this little bowl?”

“Perish the thought!” said Dinah, rushing into the room behind her. She came upon a scene of lively confusion. Mrs. Murray’s wardrobe overflowed from the open trunk, as if to emphasise the inadequacy of the pegs meant for its accommodation ; she herself sat looking at it helplessly, while Parker the maid belligerently faced a chambermaid of jolly and easy-humoured aspect.

“Parker says they charge extra for washing more than once a day ;” Mrs. Murray looked up with puzzled indecision.

“Leastways so *I* understand,” said

Parker, with dignity ; " but Miss Kenyon's French is perhaps different from mine."

" Mine is only Swiss French, Parker," said Dinah, with beautiful deference ; " but I think I can screw a bath out of them. They take us for frugal Germans, but they will understand our eccentricity when I say that we are English."

" I said that my lady was *Scotch*," Parker put in, with frozen severity ; and Mrs. Murray called after Dinah, who had already run upon her errand, " Pay them anything they ask you, my dear ; I didn't know it was the custom to charge, or I shouldn't have complained." She followed Dinah out into the corridor, and, lowering her voice to a whisper, she said, " I should not like that poor foreign woman's feelings to be hurt, but she doesn't seem to mind. Do you think "—she hesitated—" do you think Parker's French——"

"I've always understood it was the purest Parisian," — Dinah was grave but for the lurking fun in her eyes ; "but we are in the benighted provinces, you know, a whole day's journey from that fountain-head."

"Well, I'm glad you can speak something they understand," said the older lady, with simplicity. "Perhaps you can get them to give us something to eat."

"I think I'm equal to that," said Dinah ; "the language of hunger is the same all the world over." She ran away smiling to herself, and tripped down the low flight of steps over whose supporting rail a vine had flung itself ; it made a chequer-work of light and shade as the wind swayed its festoons.

The courtyard was deserted at this hour, but there was at one angle of it a little arbour covered with greenery, under

which some young men sat drinking coffee. Dinah passed them unnoticed, but one of them, spying her from behind the trellis-work, said jestingly to his neighbour : " Juliet has come down from her balcony ; why don't you go and greet her, ungallant Romeo ? "

He who was thus addressed threw back his curled head with a little gesture—as who should say, " All in good time ; Juliet must wait our pleasure nowadays. "

Dinah passed through a kitchen shiningly hung with copper vessels, and savoury with odours of perpetual meals, and penetrated to a little sanctum, where sat the lineal descendant of the Conqueror—a large old lady, with a regal manner that befitted her pretensions.

" Now, now, " she waved a fat forefinger in Dinah's face, " the salles are occupied ; you cannot see them, young woman. "

"I only want something to eat," said Dinah — enjoying this form of address amazingly; "I'm aware it's against the traditions of the house to satisfy one's hunger except under the shadow of Madame de Sevigné, but two days of mal de mer have rendered one desperate."

"We serve no meals to people who are not living in the house," said the old lady, severely crushing this flippancy.

"Dear me," thought Dinah, "must we starve till I get her to understand that we are occupying the whole upper floor of her majesty's palace?"

While she humbly made her explanation Mrs. Murray was wrestling with the problem of her wardrobe, Parker looking on with prim patience. "Take your own way," Parker's attitude said; "you will have to acknowledge my superiority in the end." The poor lady was making up her

mind to sacrifice half of her cherished finery by repacking and sending it to the yacht, and was plunged into new perplexity over the selection, when Dinah came to the rescue.

"Come away," she said, "come into the little salon and rest. Parker is so clever she will manage far better without our bungling help. You were quite right, Parker," she mollified her rival, "we are to pay extra for the bath."

"I knew our French wasn't quite the same, miss." Parker gave a pacified sniff.

"Nevertheless mine has sufficed to get us some breakfast," Dinah laughed, as she led Mrs. Murray into the little sitting-room and shut the door. "But such very blue blood shouldn't keep an hotel. It seems a kind of insult to ask a lady of such ancient descent what is in the larder."

"Is she so very"—Mrs. Murray looked

perplexed—"my dear, she reminded me of Mrs. Brimble."

"She is the very veriest. Of course we all came over with the Conqueror, but she stayed here on his own ground ; I saw her just now in the identical room where he revelled before we all set sail with him to England."

"It's a good while ago, Dinah," said Mrs. Murray with dubious questioning.

"Yes," said the lady-help cheerfully ; "but a few centuries more or less are nothing if one has faith. By the bye, I encountered a more substantial reminder of Mrs. Brimble just now. I met some one."

"Not Mr. Jack!" Mrs. Murray questioned alarmedly.

"No—Mr. Bolde."

"And what did he do?" Mrs. Murray's kind face was anxious.

"Oh, he started dramatically and said—'Ye gods! Miss Kenyon!'"

"And what did you do?"

"I started melodramatically. It was a plagiarism, but I always like to be even with Mr. Bolde—and said—'Ye gods! Mr. Bolde!'"

"I wish he hadn't come, Dinah, I—I was getting rather tired of him." She said this as if it were deepest treason.

"I was that a long time ago," said Dinah slowly. "But he won't trouble us much. He is living with others of his kind, French and English, at Trouville, and only came here to sketch. He was pleased to say I made a very good subject, standing on the balcony."

"So I am sure you did, child."

"Very likely," said Dinah lightly, "but I've no fancy to play Juliet to his Romeo. Here is breakfast at last; I could almost

have eaten the Conqueror's sacred boat-chain if they kept us fasting much longer."

The late breakfast over, and the question of the wardrobe settled satisfactorily, Mrs. Murray declared she yet felt the motion of the yacht in crossing the polished floor, and was easily persuaded to try the attractions of the red velvet sofa. Dinah hovered about, giving little touches of re-arrangement to the room; at first Mrs. Murray was talkative, and full of lively comparisons between the French and English mode of life, but presently she lapsed into longer and longer blanks of silence, and at last her eyelids drooped, and the corners of her mouth took the placid set of sleep.

Dinah drew the outside shutters together softly, and stole out by a glass door that gave upon the balcony. She had made sure some time ago of Mr. Bolde's

absence ; from the safe shelter of her own room she had seen him order his hired carriage, and, mounting it with his friends, depart in a cloud of dust and dignity and gentle disdain ; it seemed a pity that all this well-tailored culture should be wasted on a few staring chambermaids and waiters, but that was owing only to the accident of the hour. The fresh little morning wind had drooped and died away, and there was a delicious brooding languor in the first beginnings of the afternoon. The courtyard, so full of animated bustle on their arrival, was empty and silent ; a row of vehicles with their shafts turned up was ranged against the wall ; the pigeons preened themselves on a sunny roof ; the tide of life had ebbed and would not flow back till evening.

Dinah, after a careful scrutiny all round her, went slowly down the wooden steps

and crossed the flagged court to the little harbour in the corner. Here life widened somewhat about her. From her new position she commanded a glimpse of an inner court where the horses that were to drag the carriage-loads of holiday folks away by and by were peacefully munching; the unequal step of a lame hostler, and the clank of his pail as he moved about, were the only sounds to be heard.

Turning her back on these homely details, she faced the rounded archway by which one enters on all this rude and simple comfort. The arch was deep, and full of shadow, its outer face draped thick with ivy, and creepers that turn crimson in autumn; just now the detached sprays that fell in long fringes looked black seen against the sunlight beyond. This opening framed a bit of landscape that was a pleasure to look at in the July heat, though

it had no pretensions to beauty, and offered nothing more than a flat breadth of land, green for the most part, but brown here and there where the sand encroached, and which was rimmed and finished off with a sparkling glimpse of sea. It was that blue distance that was so alluring ; Dinah loved it now that she looked at it from the shore ; she even forgave it its treacherous behaviour of the night, for, with her sound health and good spirits, she had ceased to feel ill from the moment she set foot on solid land. She leaned back and looked at it, meaning to retaliate by taking her full delight out of it for many weeks ; here she was mistress over it ; its most freakish humour could only add to her pleasure ; she had a fancy to see it lash itself into impotent rage, that she might hug herself the more on her security from the least or the greatest of its moods. She laughed

as she remembered the incidents of the night, and its abandonment to anguish ; it had all the unreality of a dream.

The suddenness of the outset added to this feeling. The exodus from London had had the colour of a flight ; Dinah kept her correspondence with Dick and her consultations of Bradshaw a great mystery, and it was not till she and Mrs. Murray were well on their way to Newhaven, where the *Edina* was hovering about for them, that a little shower of notes, explanatory and apologetic, alighted on the disappointed and angry Islingtonians. Dinah, perhaps, more than the others, understood the full meaning of this going away. It was not so much a mere pleasure-trip as the recognised beginning of a new life, in which many things were to be forgotten and forsaken ; in which Venice was to grow well, and one fond heart be made content.

Dinah's eyes filled with tears, which she brushed hastily aside; there was nothing to disquiet her in the thought of the love that was to be crowned here; it was Dick the conqueror who had sailed over the seas; here in sunny France love and life were to go hand in hand. Was she not glad? She hid her face in her hands, she searched her heart, and she knew that it answered her truly. From its deepest depths she was glad.

The thought of one love-problem that promised to work itself out so peacefully, suggested another that had ended somewhat disastrously. Dinah supposed that it was Mr. Bolde's intrusion that reminded her of his faithful disciple, Mr. Papillon; but for my part, I think that with every new pair of lovers she sees making their venture, a woman's mind instinctively reverts to her own misused chances in this lottery.

A suitor, even the most firmly rejected, and the most impossible of husbands, is never quite the same as another man in the eyes of the woman he has loved; she thinks of him sometimes a little remorsefully, sometimes with a little smiling pity, but always with a shade of apartness and difference in her thought. Sometimes she tries to piece out and picture to herself her life as it might have been shaped by a yes instead of a no, and this is just what Dinah did that idle afternoon.

Her imaginations were quite lenient and kind, but she laughed at the picture they drew for her, and in this laughter the poet, could he have heard it, would have finally read the downfall of any hopes he might still have cherished.

Dinah had wandered far indeed from the world she had come out to admire, and it was not till a whirr of wings startled her,

as the pigeons, awake to the first hint of scattered corn, swooped down lightly from the gable above her, that she awoke and chided herself for her sentimental folly. Her chief sensation, after all, as she got up, was irritation against Mr. Bolde. He savoured too much of Botticelli, and of Mrs. Challice, whom he had lately "taken up," and of all the things and people she most wished to forget—even of Lord Heatherleigh, of whom the *Edina* was a quite sufficient reminder. She wished now, fruitlessly, that she had left melodrama to Mr. Bolde, and had asked him how long he meant to stay.

In the little salon she found Mrs. Murray still placidly unconscious, and on entering the adjoining bedroom to fetch her hat and parasol, her eyes first fell on Parker, her chin buried in her bosom, and the gown she had been mending fallen at her feet.

It seemed a sort of judgment on Parker's primness that her cap should have twisted itself awry ; it had an air of mocking jauntiness as it fell over her ear that seemed quite shocking, and Dinah mercifully set it straight. Parker's slumbers were so profound that she did not stir under the light touch ; the fallen dress at her feet took on accidentally an attitude of profound weariness too ; it lay limp and huddled, with armless sleeves flung out as if in a very despair of exhaustion.

Dinah stole away from this slumbrous atmosphere, herself most vitally awake, and went to pay her promised visit to Venetia. She passed under the deep arch, and emerged at once into glittering sunlight. The railway, which no doubt rushes right down to the sea now, was not then made, and some half-mile of dusty highway separated the old inn from the

shore. She remembered the right turnings, but indeed, since all the world was going seawards it would have been difficult to mistake them. There were youths and maidens who were clearly lovers, or who more likely, being French, had reached the bridal stage, and who were too rapturously busy with each other to have eyes for any one else; there were young men with beautiful yellow kid gloves, and flowers in their buttonholes, who drove very small donkeys with an air of ostentatious gaiety; there were sober elderly folks, and children in smart seaside costumes, all drawn on by the crisp scent of the sea, and cheerfully braving the clouds of dust that powdered them with every passing carriage.

The briny bouquet was everywhere subtly felt in the air, but the shore was hidden till a sudden sharp bend brought it

to view. It had a happy air of animation at this hour when the whole population was abroad. There were flags fluttering from the pavilion, and the bathers were hurrying down the steps and shuffling with sandalled feet across the loose sand ; the spectators had conscientiously paid their pence and taken their chairs. It was all very French ; the dipping sun was a bit of the show, like the fantastic costumes of the bold bathers for whom the brass band brayed encouragingly as they toyed with the waves. Possibly it was a trifle operatic, but the bourgeois cheerfulness was not to be gainsaid.

Dinah passed beyond the red ropes within whose bounds all the world was gathered ; the bit of shore beyond looked lonely by contrast, and gave a solitary old gentleman gazing out towards the sea the air of an alien and an outcast. Dinah

speedily recognised Mr. Dundas, though he had so far yielded to British prejudice as to wear a white scarf twisted round his hat. He looked forlorn and helplessly aimless; perhaps, too, a little cross; she could easily guess that he missed his slippers and his newspaper, his punctual dinner-hour, and his afternoon sleep among his books. He recognised Dinah with uplifted brows and an outstretched hand, and seemed very glad to see her.

"I was coming to look you and Mrs. Murray up," he said, "but I was waiting for Dick to pilot me. He couldn't resist the sea."

"Dick among the bathers?"

"No, no, not among that Frenchified crew. You don't catch Dick making a show of himself. He's gone off along the shore to see if he can't get his dip in peace, but I question if they'll let him;

you've got to do as you're told in this free country."

"If he gets well beyond Houlgate there will be no one to see him, nobody will dream of walking in the bathing hour. How is Venice?" She cast a backward look at the fantastic villa behind them on whose windows the westering sun was blazing.

"She is sleeping. Of course she is tired; that's only to be looked for;" he said this assertingly, almost as if Dinah had contradicted him; he drew his brows together and looked at her furtively.

"Of course," said Dinah eagerly. They all said of course to each other when they spoke of Venetia's lack of strength; there were such excellent reasons why the cure that was so certain had not yet begun. "She will be all right to-morrow."

"I'm tired myself for that matter. It's twenty years since I was abroad," he said slowly, following some unspoken train of thought, "twenty years; that's a long while in the passing, but it's a little while to look back on."

Twenty years of monotonous custom were slowly yielding, and the curtain falling aside revealed the half-forgotten past. Was he thinking of Venetia's mother?

"This time it will be a very happy going home," said Dinah gently. "Though I for one am glad enough to forsake London for a little," she added, trying to give a new turn to the talk.

The half-perplexed sadness of the laird's eyes gave place to a kindly, humorous look. "Your experiment, Dick tells me, didn't quite——"

"No, it didn't succeed; it failed horribly.

Dick says it was because we didn't begin low enough down."

"Pooh, nonsensical rubbish," said the laird, with light contempt for Dick's logic. "Don't you listen to him, my dear young lady, or he will lead you a pretty dance! That sort of philanthropy is a disease of the age; in my day, a young fellow's enthusiasms were hardly of that order; they blazed and died out, and so will this; there's comfort in that. It will come to an end."

"I shouldn't like it to come to an end if it did any good," said Dinah, who found this rhetoric rather damping.

"Lifting people out of their proper sphere can never do any good," said Mr. Dundas, with that sort of smiling finality a man is apt to use towards a woman in argument. Gentlemen, old and young alike, refuse to indulge pretty girls in their love of argument. Pretty girls were made

for something else. "Your intentions were most kind and gracious, but that class doesn't understand, you see; they only abuse your kindness."

"Oh, that isn't the trouble," said Dinah, rather sorely; "I think it was very presumptuous to fancy I could help them at all; aren't their ways and ideas——" she stopped suddenly and drew herself up rather haughtily, while the colour flamed into her cheek. Mr. Dundas, who was facing her, turned sharply round and saw two young men lounging along the margin of firm damp sand. They were dressed with an affectation of difference from their neighbours, and one of them bowed with graceful and languid condescension, as if he only gave himself the trouble because convention demanded it of him. Dinah's eyes sparkled rather wickedly as she followed them with her glance.

"That," she said, with a smile that would not be repressed, "that is what I wanted poor Islington to become. Think of Islington given over to that! Have you seen Mr. Brimble?" she asked suddenly.

"No. Is that he?"

"Oh no," Dinah laughed. "How disgusted Mr. Bolde would be. Mr. Bolde never did anything useful in his life."

Mr. Dundas looked after the strangers with puzzled amusement. He had seen Dinah's blushes, and as he thought of his pretty companion it was not difficult to divine the situation. "A lover," he thought kindly, "and an ardent one to follow her here." Why not? To a chivalrous old gentleman every man is a young girl's faithful knight. Before he could speak, if indeed he knew what to say, Mrs. Arabin came out to them; she

told them Venice was awake and had asked to see Dinah.

"Go up and I'll wait here and take a breath of the sea air," she said, and Dinah ran off.

Venice sat in a great chair drawn up to the open window which faced the sea. Mrs. Arabin had taken Mr. Dundas's arm, and the two paced slowly up and down well removed from the band and the dignified bathers.

"Does Portobello please you?" said Dinah, leaning over the back of the chair till her cheek touched Venetia's.

"Dinah," said Venice, ignoring this question, "tell me, was that Mr. Papillon?"

"No," said Dinah, "it was only his model; strict justice compels me to add that in this instance the copy is better than the original."

"Then"—Venice spoke hesitatingly—
"is it——"

"No," said Dinah quickly, "it isn't."

"I wonder if we understand each other?"
Venice kept her absent eyes fixed on the sea.

"Well, it's rather like a game of consequences, where you answer without knowing the question. What am I to tell you, my dear?"

"Is he coming here?"

"No, there is nothing for him to come for. I tried to shape, and tone, and pinch, and limit myself, but it wouldn't do. The old Adam, as your David says, was too strong for me;" she laughed a little nervously. "It would have come to an explosion some day, and it might have blown up more than myself."

Venice said nothing for a time. After a while she put up her hand with a little

caressing touch to Dinah's cheek. The sun had sunk into the sea now, and already the quick-coming dusk was lurking at hand.

"Dinah," she said, and it was hardly more than a whisper, "Dinah, it was you who sent that ring to Dick long ago."

"You forgive me!" said Dinah, with a quick breath. "Yes, it was I. I was afraid it might be Lord Heatherleigh——"

"It never could have been he."

"No, I know that now, but I did not know you then, Venice, and I feared some hindering scruple. It was very dangerous and wrong to meddle, but now that it is Dick—Venice," she cried, with a ring of pain in her voice, for Venetia's hand had dropped at her side, "Venice, say you forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive," said Venice, but her voice sounded faint, and it

fell with a strange chill on Dinah's heart. "Dick and I understand each other; we talked of it a long time ago," she went on, looking seawards, as if with some sad prescience she could see the march of the coming years and the events that would shape them. "Some day," she went on after a pause, "Dick will give you that little ring back again, Dinah, and you will keep it for my sake, because I did give it you first." Venice spoke a little eagerly now. "You will keep it when he gives it you, Dinah? It's a poor little ring, but it has a sort of story, you see——"

"No, no, no!" cried Dinah passionately, "I will take nothing from Dick, nothing at all. What am I to Dick, or he to me? it is you—you——"

"Ah, poor Dick!" said Venice, with a sudden sob, "Dinah, you must comfort him."

The tragic and the commonplace are often closely allied in this life of ours. Dinah all her days remembered with a sad vividness that would outlive other impressions the mental shock she received when she first perceived Venetia's meaning, and she always associated it with Mrs. Arabin's coming in and closing the window with a disapproving shake of the head.

"You must learn to be a better nurse before I trust Venetia to you." She forgave Dinah with a smile. "Don't you see, bairns, the sun is set?"

IX.

DINAH went home in a sort of stony quiet, she did not see the bathers—a fantastic crowd in their dripping finery set against the red light—the band had a mocking cruelty in its discords: it was playing a gay air clumsily, as if it relied on the listeners' happiness to overlook all the false notes and wrong accents; no doubt the lovers found it good enough music to set their joy to, but it struck in on Dinah's soul like laughter over an open grave.

Her one great desire was to get away before Dick returned from his bath; he had gone towards Houlgate, and as her path lay in an opposite direction her heart

need not have fluttered at every step behind her. He could hardly have overtaken her, and besides he would be with Venice.

She would have liked to fly away and never see him again. She felt as if her heart would die within her if her eyes should rest on his face when he came to know the truth. The truth? She thrust it from her with blank rejection; she fought fiercely with the doubt that crept coldly about her heart—Venice had meant something else; she had not meant that she was going to leave them.

As she approached the outskirts of the long rambling inn, she noticed that the door of the smaller *salle* which gave upon the highway stood open. She knew that by passing through the larger room beyond she could reach her own little wooden staircase without crossing the court. It

was a quieter way, and she turned in. The room was almost dark after the pale outer dusk ; the remains of a big lunch or dinner was spread on the table, and the air was faint with the sickly smell of much past eating and drinking. Some huge family party had broken its fast successfully, ' to judge by the disordered chairs, the napkins tossed about, and the corks that had been drawn. She was afraid she might meet all this well-fed jollity getting into its carriages to go home, so she settled with herself to linger for a little where she was. The atmosphere was hardly pleasant, but it was more tolerable than the laughter and jests of happy people.

She sat down in a corner behind the open door where the cool air stole in ; beyond her the stiff gold arms of the Louis XIV. chair, which is set apart as the chief glory of this pretty room, gleamed

out of the dusk. Dinah leaned back and tried to think, but she could not think ; she was conscious of nothing but of a violent repulsion from the bare possibility of death coming to strip life—Dick's life. Perhaps no one who has lived beyond childhood before death makes its first demand on his intimate friendships, will ever forget the utterly incredulous stand—the wild revolt that the heart makes against it. Afterwards, custom dulls the blow, and one takes the repeated assaults more calmly.

Dinah put her fingers to her pulse and felt its full, even beat ; she touched her cheek, cool with health : though she sat it was not for weariness. Her own warm-blooded vitality was a triumphant argument against her fears. Far off and faint now she could distinguish the strains of the band making music for happy people ; if she could but shut it out she might

almost hear the lap of the waves on the shore—all these things spoke of life; the very sun had only gone to shine somewhere else and would return with the dawning; here was only old custom, and peaceful usage with no hint of change in it—she was a craven and a coward to fear.

As she sat thus in conflict with herself she heard a step that she knew. It was Dick on his way to the inn; she cowered farther back in her corner; Dick had unconsciously caught the air of the band, and was whistling it low under his breath; there was nothing disquieting in the sound, yet when he paused a moment at the open door and took a cursory look within, a tremor of fear passed through Dinah, and she shrank deeper among the shadows. Dick did not see her, his eyes dazzled with the fuller light outside, for the moon was now faintly silvering the world, and he

went on his way still humming absently to himself. Dinah breathed more freely then ; she did not ask herself why she was all at once so unwilling to meet Dick ; she only knew it was so. She could not give her shrinking any certain shape, but she indulged it by staying where she was. Dick would find Mrs. Murray—for surely her companion must by this time have had her fill of sleep—and they would have their chat ; there would be the endless charities which were sure to follow them across the sea to discuss, and first of all, there would be Mrs. Murray's foreign experiences to hear ; Dinah could see Dick poking about the little suite of rooms, and laughing with his mistress over their innocent simplicity ; he would be sure to be told about Mr. Bolde, and very likely about the bath ; he would compliment Parker on her French being too good for recognition—Dick could

break through the hedge of Parker's primness as nobody else could—and then after a while he would come away and Dinah would go home.

All this settled, she leaned back in her chair; a glimmer of the light that was broadening outside stole in and brought to life now one thing, now another, with fine impartiality making them all equally beautiful, from the empty champagne bottle, with its neck of gold, to the bit of tattered and storied silken brocade hanging on the opposite wall. Madame de Sevigné's chair glimmered with such doubtful mysteriousness that it was not difficult to conjure up the gracious figure seated in it; dropping down here for a night and a day on her flight to Les Rochers. Dinah imagined her reclining between those stiff golden arms, her pen fallen from her fingers, but a smile on her lips as she lingered over the

phrases that speak to us with a living voice across the century. She played with her fancy till she could make out easily the lines of the loose dress, nicely chosen to suit the rustic surroundings, and the point of the little embroidered shoe thrust out to catch the light.

Her thoughts running on idly in this way she forgot, for the moment, her troubles and fears ; it was very quiet, and the dim light insensibly soothed her. She was grateful for her tranquil corner, but at the same time she felt herself in some sort the guardian of the place and its treasures ; it was careless, even in honest little Dives, to make things so pleasantly easy for a covetous person—Mr. Bolde, for instance, if he should pass by the open door and see those Louis XIV. arms held out to him, would his virtue be proof against the temptation ?

While she was considering this, a mur-

mur of voices reached her from the inner room, and the door of communication was suddenly opened. Dinah started up; it was not Madame de Chaulnes come bustling in to recommend an early start to the charming scribbler she had pictured in the chair; she had recognised Dick's limited French, and here he was, making it go as far as it would in talk with the same rosy chambermaid who had rebuked Parker's Paris accent. The maid held a candle; she had come, indeed, to fulfil her neglected duty of shutting up for the night, and was only hindered by Dick's curiosity. As the flame lit up the smaller room, Dinah felt that concealment or flight was quite out of the question—indeed Dick had already spied her.

“Why, Dinah!” he cried, and then laughed. “So you are doing the sentimental in the moonlight—I didn't suspect

you of such yielding to the conventional. It's what the newspapers call an agreeable disappointment after the tragic fears we had been indulging in. Mrs. Murray is persuaded that the sight of Mr. Bolde must have stirred your conscience and sent you back to Islington, and I came out to trace your flight."

"I—I was tired," said Dinah, without taking up his challenge as usual and answering him with saucy repartee.

"And a jolly place to be tired in, too," said Dick, seating himself on the edge of the table. The maid had bolted the outer door, and recognising Dinah as a guest of the house went away, with a good-natured glance of intelligence at the two, leaving the access towards the court open. Dick had borrowed her candle, and he held it up, flashing it about on the oak and the windows which were waiting dead and dull

until to-morrow's sunlight should reveal their beauty.

"It's a trifle spectral," he said, "but whether it is 'stark' William who haunts it, or Madame de Sevigné who comes to write letters from the spirit world, or only that heavily-dined crew I met just now, sneaking back to drain the empty champagne bottles, it would be difficult to say. What did the darkness reveal to you?"

Dinah turned away with a sharp action. What had not the dim solitude revealed to her of coming sorrow?

"I saw Madame de Sevigné," she said, with an attempt at gaiety. "You are quite right; she comes back here to write to her detestable daughter, who, if she gets her deserts, is no doubt on some lower ledge of purgatory. If Mrs. Murray is anxious I must go to her," she broke off, moving away.

"There's no such haste; let me have a look round first."

"Dick, I want to go."

"Tell me more about the Seigné lady; I'm hazy about her."

"I can't. You can look round without me. I forgot how long I had been away; Mrs. Murray was sleeping when I left."

"I don't think she is quite awake yet;" Dick laughed. He was following her slowly across the larger room to the door, stopping every now and then to lift his light upon a bit of china or brass.

"After the burnished newness of Sydney this dropping old place must seem somewhat dreamlike."

"This isn't so very unlike Bayswater," Dinah answered, anxious to escape, and yet of all things anxious that he should not be attracted by anything different in her manner. "Its old newness is just what

we all affect, but it seems a kind of insult here, where surely there was age enough without this pretence of it."

"It's so like that I shouldn't care to trust friend Bolde here without an escort ; perhaps he doubts himself,—anyhow he's leaving ; I met him a few minutes ago wrangling over the hire of a carriage to take him off to-morrow ; it's curious what a keen sense these Botticellians have of a bargain."

"I am glad he is going—very glad."

"Well—yes," Dick smiled ; "he didn't seem somehow to fit in here ; perhaps the bourgeois gaiety jarred on him ; Trouville will soothe him down. Doesn't it strike you as a very gay little place, Dinah ?" They were standing at the open door leading to the court ; the moon flooded its now quiet spaces, and shone on the wooden flight of steps, but Dick still absently held up his light.

"Yes," said Dinah reluctantly.

"A trifle Islingtonian in its style, but that should recommend it the more to us ; or perhaps it is only that Venice seems so much better. There's health in the very air—why, you can scent the sea up here. If there's a breeze to-morrow, we'll get Venice aboard the *Edina*, and go on a cruise of discovery. Oh, I forgot! that won't be all pleasure to you."

"No, but it doesn't matter. I—I can stay on shore. I think I hear Mrs. Murray—I must go. Good-night, Dick."

"Good - night," Dick answered. He crossed with her to the bottom of the stair, and held up his candle as if to light the way. Then he laughed, and blew it out. "What am I to do with this thing?" he called to her, when she was about half-way up. She came back and took it from him. "I wish you wouldn't go in yet," he said

coaxingly, "it's so jolly out here. Come down and have a look at the sea."

"I can't, I can't," said Dinah, hurrying away; but when she got to the top of the stair she lingered, watching Dick cross the lighted silence and disappear under the archway.

"Is that you, Dinah?" a door was opened behind, and a head thrust out. "I'm glad you've come back." Mrs. Murray put out a hand, and drew the girl into a dazzle of lamplight. "I was getting a little anxious about you, and I sent Dick to find you."

"Yes—I've been a long while away," said Dinah slowly. "I met Dick just now."

"Oh, not so long, I daresay, but just long enough for us both to be hungry;" she put her arm round Dinah's waist, and turned her with a quick movement towards

a well-spread table. "It's Parker's doing—all her own ordering. Isn't she a clever creature?" said Parker's mistress, with a happy laugh. "The old landlady came up herself to see what we would have, and, dear me, all the phrases you taught me went out of my head in a minute, and I couldn't remember which was the sentence about the tea being strong, and which was the one about the weather. But it's good strong tea all the same; Parker managed it, and she made a cosey too. There's nothing like a newspaper cosey for keeping in the heat. I learned that in our bush days long ago."

Mrs. Murray ran on with a cheerful garrulity, and Dinah was fain to pretend to a great appetite, that her silence might be covered; she felt as if her voice would betray her.

"I think I'll like this place very much,"

Mrs. Murray was saying; "not but what I liked it for myself the first minute I set eyes on it, but there was Job to think of. When I had done sleeping and found you gone, I went out into the balcony for a little air, and as I was standing there a fine carriage came dashing into the yard, and a lady and gentleman got out. I watched them quite a good while talking to the landlady. There was something to make you look at them, you know; and Parker, who was downstairs at the time, tells me they are a count and countess. She brought me up the visitor's book to look at; I couldn't read a word of the queer writing myself, but Parker says it is quite full of earls and barons. So you are right, dear." Mrs. Murray gave a sigh of satisfaction as she helped herself to bread and butter. "Job would be pleased, for he always wanted me to have the best."

"Yes, indeed," Dinah assented, not feeling bound to represent the popular view of foreign nobility; "we are in the very inner sanctuary of aristocracy here, on the Conqueror's own ground." She rose and pushed back her chair. "Would you think it dreadful of me if I went to bed?" she asked; "I'm a little tired, I think."

"To be sure, dear; you hadn't my long nap; and after last night, too—to think it was only last night!" She had taken Dinah's two hands, and as the young girl stooped to kiss her, she held her a little aloof.

"Dick was very happy," she said, with her sympathetic smile; "it does my heart good, Dinah, to see the boy so bright."

"Yes"—Dinah bent forward and gave the good-night kiss—"if—if it lasts;" the words seemed forced from her.

“Oh, it will last—why not? Venice is much better.”

Dinah made an excuse of her tiredness to go off without answering. Shut in her own little room she felt as if she must wake and entertain her heavy heart all night long, but for all that she slept soon and soundly.

For the next week or two it was her daily trouble to watch furtively for any look on another face to justify or dissipate her fears. Sometimes when Venice came back from a cruise in the *Edina* with a colour in her pale cheeks and a light in her eyes, Dinah forgot her misgivings and contributed her little jokes to the general laughter; sometimes a look, a movement, a tone of the voice, or a turn of a phrase, brought back the cold chill to her heart. She felt herself like the possessor of a guilty secret who fears to betray himself,

and one morning reads in the eyes of another that his inmost thought is known.

Dinah very soon found out that Mrs. Arabin knew, and there was a pathetic irritability in the laird's manner, an assumption of knowing better than others in his voice, that made her dread he had guessed the truth. She was very sorry for him and for his evident want of ease in his new surroundings.

"I'm too old to transplant," he said to her once with a frowning smile ; and it was true. The Scotch bit of him had so overlaid the foreign habit of his earlier years, that he could no longer adapt himself to the gay trivial life ; he missed his sheep and his hills and his dim old library, and there was nothing to supply their lack.

Dinah often joined him stumping about the sand, left compact and smooth by the ebbing tide ; at these times he was apt to

be a little scornful over the brisk liveliness of his fellow-visitors—the bearded idlers who amused themselves for a whole morning over the vagaries of a pink paper kite, or the family bands who set out in picturesque disarray eel-hunting. The sore heart of the man expressed itself in an outer crustiness that was quite foreign to his nature; he massed the French nation in the concrete, and spoke of it with that accent of contemptuous indulgence that was in fashion in the days of our grandfathers, when it was quite an established pleasantry to speak of “mounseer” as a frog-eating, gesticulating, and dancing mountebank.

“We must get out of this soon,” he said; “whenever Venice is a little stronger we shall go home. The air here is too soft for me, and even Dick looks pulled down a bit. We Scotch people miss our

snell winds. You must spare Dick to us now, Miss Kenyon."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Dinah quickly, "I—I didn't suppose he would care to come back."

"He must stay at home and look after the land. I have his promise, and when he marries——"

"Yes," said Dinah again, hastily as before. "Isn't that the *Edina*? They are going famously before the wind to-day."

The laird pulled out his opera-glass and eagerly followed the little yacht skimming like a bird over the water. "Why, it must be full time for us to set out," he said, lowering the glass and pulling out his watch. "Are you ready, my dear, or must you run up to the looking-glass first?"

"I am quite ready," she said, stepping out hastily with him, "and I daresay the carriage will be here."

The yachting party was to hover about a little port at some leagues distance along the shore, and there await Dinah and Mr. Dundas, who had arranged to approach the same point by land. Dinah seldom joined the cruisers in the *Edina*; she made her indifferent seamanship an excuse, but in reality she shrank from Dick; she thought it would break her heart to see the sorrow dawn in his eyes.

The route of the carriage pair lay through a pleasant orchard land, dropping with fast ripening fruit. The apples were red with August sunshine, and seemed almost pleading to be eaten; they passed many farmhouses snugly tucked away among trees, but the sea was never distant from them, and its scent followed them all the way till they came face to face with it once more at the little watering-place which was their goal.

They drove straight to the chief hotel ; it stood some way back from the beach, and had a garden gaily set out with sun-flowers and marigolds. They alighted, and were shown into a bare upper room, with a lingering odour pervading it of all the breakfasts and teas that had ever been eaten in it. The waiter who had preceded them upstairs now followed them and hovered about with an elaborate air of not waiting for orders. Mr. Dundas cast a glance all round him, and then looked at Dinah.

“We must have some coffee,” he said, “we will not be so rash as to venture on tea.” He gave his orders in his slow old-fashioned French, and pushing forward the chair that promised least discomfort for Dinah, he took his hat and went off to make inquiry after the seafarers.

Dinah, left alone, strayed to the window

with the intention of opening it, but it refused to yield to her efforts, and she desisted, hot and breathless. She tossed over the newspapers that lay about, and finding nothing in the thin, ill-printed sheets to interest her, she finally returned to the window. The view was tantalisingly limited by a house opposite, jealously enclosed in high walls, but the garden spread below looked surprisingly gay, and yielding to a sudden impulse she determined to await Mr. Dundas's return there.

After all, when she reached it, it was a somewhat disappointing paradise; one or two poplars reared themselves against the sky and bent and swayed their heads in the wind, and there was a waste of marigolds studding the sandy soil, gold against gold. Dinah drew a garden seat out of a melancholy cork arbour that tried to hide itself behind the naked poplar stems, and

sat down in a patch of sunlight. She took off her hat and let the wind blow about her hair; she had placed herself in such a position that she was sure to see Mr. Dundas whenever he opened the little gate, but it was too soon to look for him yet, and she idly stooped to pick the yellow stars at her feet. Her head was bent, and her ears busy only to catch the click of the latch; she did not hear a step that crossed the garden from the other side, and she did not look up till a shadow fell straggling towards the poplar group.

At first she thought it was only the waiter come to herald the coffee, and she glanced up carelessly into Owen Challice's face. She did not move; she looked at him fixedly; he had been so intimately in her thoughts of late that it did not seem strange to see him here; all the events of the past year seemed to rise and shape

themselves before her as she gazed at him. She noticed, almost without knowing that she noticed it, how much older and sadder he had grown as his eyes rested on hers in dull hopeless misery. He had a vanquished look as if he had found the world too hard—he whom she had always held so gaily cynical.

If any one had asked Dinah a week or two before how she should meet this man who had blighted Venetia's youth, her antagonism would have expressed itself with impulsive contempt; she had been used to think of him with a burning sense of indignant anger, but now as she looked at him and saw the lonely sadness that wrapped about his life, her inward resistance died out in a great pity. She thought with a subduing pang of the irrevocable decree that divided two lives, and the love that had before seemed a sacrilege, was

somehow consecrated and atoned for by near-coming death. As she felt this new sense of sympathy steal over her, her eyes filled with tears.

“Ah, you too,” said Challice, speaking for the first time, “you too, would tell me there is no hope.”

Dinah bowed her head and her sobs came thick and fast. His words gave shape to her long-repressed fears, and she knew 'they were true. It was a strange meeting; it had begun without any conventional preface and now Dinah sobbed on unrestrainedly, feeling only a sad comfort in letting her pent-up grief go free. She need no longer restrain it, for Challice looked as if nothing could hurt him any more.

He did not try to comfort her; he leaned against the poplar stem, and looked at her with a sad, hopeless forlornness.

Her passionate grief struck him almost as strange ; he did not know that her sorrow was half for Dick ; for himself he resisted no more ; the irrevocable had happened ; the bitterness of death was already past ; he had suffered its worst tortures that day on the misty hillside long ago, and there was only its empty deadly loneliness left.

Dinah checked her sobbing by and by, and drying her eyes looked up. The storm of tears had eased her heart.

“ Perhaps it is not so bad as we think,” she said, with a dim impulse to help and comfort her companion—“ to have a life so full of love to the very last, and to go away before one is too old to care—that should not be so very hard. It is for those that are left that it is hard.” Her voice had a keen edge of pain in it ; her thoughts had slidden back to Dick ; she had forgotten every trouble but his. With the remem-

brance of Dick—who might appear any moment at the little gate come to summon her, a new fear darted through her mind. Dick and Owen Challice must not meet. Her heart beat fast as she pictured them facing each other in anger—in hatred ; the shamefulness of the imagined scene filled her with terror.

“ You must go away,” she said hurriedly, “ now—at once ; Mr. Dundas is coming—they are all here, and—it would pain them to see you.”

“ Yes, I will go,” he answered, straightening himself listlessly. “ I have no part or lot in your trouble, and, as you say, it would be useless pain.” He did not move away at once, and in her impatience, her fear, her sorrow, some tinge of the old contempt, coloured her mind.

“ Why did you come at all ?” she said hardly ; “ or why, since you did come, did

you keep silence—such a useless, senseless, wicked silence! If she had been used to think of you as outside of her life, apart from it, never a possible sharer in it, do you not think that she would have rested content with the happiness within her reach? Oh, it is not so hard as all that to love some one who is good and worthy—not so hard! But for you it would have been easy—easy!” She broke off suddenly, oppressed with a sense of the futility of her anger. He met it with an unchanged face; perhaps he never even heard it—at most it came to him as an echo of his own past struggles; it had no power to move him.

As Dinah looked at him, urgent that he should go before the others came, some train of association recalled his wife as she had seen her last—mildly gracious, a charming woman, as people said, but a woman

who might, all the same, stifle the life out of a man's better aspirations.

"Ah, I am sorry for you," she said, impulsively reverting to her first feeling—it was easy to be sorry for him on this ground—"I wish I could help you."

She put out her hand and he took it mechanically for a moment in his own and then let it drop. Her pity no more touched him than her reproach.

"There is no help possible," he said.

There was a moment's silence between them while Dinah's compassion struggled with her dread; she seemed to be all a quivering ear listening for Dick's happy step.

"I am living here," he said at last, indicating the house behind him with a motion of his hand. "When the end comes will you let me know?"

"Yes," she promised sadly, and with that simple assurance he turned away.

X.

DINAH sank down again dizzily among the garish marigolds, and dropped her face in her hands. The sunlight seemed cruel. She was agitated with the meeting and its strange piteousness, but she had hardly a moment to calm herself before she heard the latch click and lifting her head saw Mr. Dundas advancing towards her ; with deep thankfulness she saw that he was alone. She drew her veil down hastily and went to meet him.

“ They’re off home,” he said, speaking before he got up to her ; “ it’s too rough for them to come inshore ; there’s quite a breeze on. You should come down to the

beach and look at it. You can't have an idea of it up here."

"I thought it was windy." Dinah glanced up at the swaying poplars. "I should like to see the waves—but perhaps the coffee might be cold."

"Ah, yes," he said with a little grimace, "black, undrinkable stuff, no doubt, but we've got to drink it, for the good of the house if not for our own."

Dinah made an excuse of going indoors to ask to be shown to a room where she could bathe her aching eyes. She laved them eagerly, but as she looked in the glass she saw that their red rims still betrayed her.

"I must go with my veil plastered over my face," she said, with a melancholy attempt to rally her cheerfulness. "I hope Mr. Dundas will think that I'm obeying a demand of fashion by eating and drinking with it on."

The laird was too preoccupied to notice what she wore ; he was fidgeting about the table where the cups were spread, and helped her whenever she came in.

"It's genuine French coffee, I suppose they would tell you," he said, sipping it critically ; "but I'm barbarous enough to prefer our English adulteration."

"No sugar, thanks," said Dinah.

"Ah, you want to get the full flavour of it. If you don't mind waiting to look at the sea till we get home," he said, explaining the air of anxiety his manner had worn, "I think we'd better start at once. I can promise you you will miss nothing by the delay. There's a regular storm brewing, if I know anything of the sky."

"Oh, I should like of all things to go," said Dinah, pushing away her cup ; "it takes so long to drive, and the others will be back before us."

They made the homeward journey almost in silence. Dinah could see that her companion was watching every bend and curve of the road, and mentally checking off the distance yet to be traversed. It was no new anxiety that oppressed him, but only the vague ache of a trouble that was coming a little nearer every day.

"I'm afraid I'm very dull company for you, my dear," he said, rousing himself as they swept through the one long street of Houlgate, the horses plucking up a fresh spirit as they neared home. "It's a pity you can't enjoy going with the young folks."

Dinah laid her ungloved hand with a timid movement on the laird's brown one; the little touch seemed to express all the fellow-feeling that she dared not put in words.

They drew rein at the turreted villa,

and Mr. Dundas was about to give orders that Dinah should be taken on to Dives, but she checked him by springing out.

"I'm not a bit tired," she said, "and would much prefer to walk. I'll just run up for a moment and see Venetia."

She hurried on before Mr. Dundas, and swiftly running upstairs, went into the room that faced the sea. Venice was there on the sofa resting—Mrs. Arabin and Dick with her. She held out her hand to Dinah.

"We played you false," she said, with a smile; "but, Dinah, you would have hated the sea to-day."

"Yes, I don't pretend like you to enjoy it," she answered lightly; but there was a world of sad thoughts in her heart as she looked down on the young girl's pale face.

Involuntarily, with that day's meeting under the poplars still agitating her, she

lifted her eyes, and they met Dick's ; and for the first time she seemed to read in them some dawning of her own hopelessness.

That was the last cruise the sailors made in the *Edina*. Mr. Dundas had rightly interpreted the sky, and the storm which had begun by playfully swaying the stately poplars, ended in a very pretty imitation of a tempest. Dinah had idly wished to see the anger of the sea, and, as if in answer to her desire, it rose in its wrath, and swept the long flat coast, sending its foamy spray far inwards. There were no rocks to resist its progress, and it rushed on as if the spirit of a demon were in it, and its impish aim were to tear down the fantastic pavilion, and lay its limp tri-colour low.

The gay bathers kept closely to their stuffy rooms, their windows shut securely against the wild dashes of rain. Many of

them would have fled, but there came doleful word that the steamers refused to cross from Honfleur, and still less from Trouville, and the foolhardy few who went off in the dripping diligence were laughed at for their pains.

It was melancholy enough in the "William the Conqueror"; there was no longer any throng of carriages in the courtyard, and the rain dripped dismally from the eaves. Mrs. Murray—one of those comfortably-balanced people who are happy anywhere—hit on the felicitous idea, graciously encouraged by Parker, of turning one of her gowns. It gave a delightful zest to the occupation, that there was not the least occasion for this practice of economy, but the remodelled gown had a value in Mrs. Murray's eyes that the bravest invention of Worth's genius could not have afforded; it reminded her of the old, happy, careful

days, when the turning of breadths and the sparing of trimmings were works of necessity.

Dinah tried to interest herself in the dressmaker's skill, and to wonder over the buttons and braid which were so much more valuable than ordinary buttons and braid, because Parker's Paris French had bought them in the one little shop of all trades, near the big Norman Church ; but her heart was sick with sorrow. There was a dreadful monotony in the daily bulletin from the turreted villa. It was always the weather ; when that mended, the sick girl would mend too. Mrs. Murray said a hundred times a day that it was only the weather. But the mid-August gales had not spent their fury ; there was now and then a lull as if the elements took breath, then the sea and the wind began their wild play again.

In one of those many pauses of comparative calm Mr. Dundas wandered out to the old inn. Dinah, from the balcony where she spent many restless hours, saw him looking vaguely about him in the courtyard, and ran down to him. He met her with the old kind chivalry, but when she entreated him to come upstairs and rest he refused almost petulantly. He wore no greatcoat, and the rain, which fell steadily, had soaked through his thin dress, and dripped from his wideawake.

"The stove upstairs is lighted," she said imploringly, "do come ; Mrs. Murray will be so grieved if you go away without seeing her," but her words only made him the more anxious to be gone.

"I must go," he said, looking at her furtively from under his bent brows. "Venice will be waiting for me ; she will miss me."

Dinah followed him out under the archway, and watched him hurrying blindly over the wet roads. He seemed to go unsteadily, or was it only the tears in her eyes that dimmed her sight? That evening she could no longer rest; an overwhelming longing to be out in the weather took hold of her and refused to be quieted. She said not a word of her intention to Mrs. Murray. She shrank with a sick distaste from the questions and remonstrances it was sure to be met with. Her mistress, who could deny nobody anything, would let her have her way, but it would be a way hedged with Parker's prim disapproval. Dinah smiled to herself as she thought of her longing, which was like that of a caged seabird, curbed into a procession composed of the landlady and the chambermaid and very likely a waiter carrying a lantern.

In the afternoon she managed to smuggle her ulster and travelling hat into a corner of the corridor, and she laced her boots with the stealth of a thief while Mrs. Murray took her after-dinner nap. When the sleeper woke there was the unfailing interest of the gown to occupy her, and it was easy to quit the room when the great matter of adjusting the braid was on hand. She drew on her ulster in feverish haste, and slipped down the sodden wooden steps, dreading every moment to hear a pleading voice call after her: "Dinah, do tell me what really is the best place for the buttons."

The door that led to the salles was locked, and she passed out under the archway and turned her steps seawards. Once well away from the inn she breathed more freely. The rain still beat in cold blasts on her face, but the moon rode through a

wild drift of clouds and now and then scattered them with a burst of light. When she reached the shore she understood for the first time the sublimity of the storm. The sea fell with a dull heavy thud on the shore, and a long line of scum and tangle and broken shells marked its steps. She crouched behind the pavilion for shelter, and held on her hat with both hands. She tasted the brine in the rain that washed her face. Far away on the coast-line faint lights fell this way and that, revealed one minute and lost the next ; when the moon rode out of the flying wrack it lit the wild tossings and heavings of the sea.

There was no one to dispute the spectacle with her ; she was alone in the wide world, as alone as Dick and Venice that night under the calm stars.

It was a long time before she trusted herself to look round at the turreted villa

set high on the beach, and fronting that world of troubled waters; she feared to face its blankness that would tell her nothing—nothing at all of what was passing within. The day's message had been, to her fancy, a little less buoyantly worded; there was still that hint of the weather, on whose changes Venice's life seemed to hang, but sky and sea had no hope in them. She turned at last; the house was dimly outlined by the moonlight; it was dark except for one upper window, in which a clear light burned. That light drew Dinah's steps irresistibly. She plunged through the soft shifting sand, blown into mountains and valleys, and reached the road; it was more sheltered there, and she made her way past the houses where people had secured themselves snugly and were making merry to pass the time.

The turreted villa had a sloping garden

of its own jealously enclosed, and the shadows gathered under its high blank wall. Dinah paused a minute, leaning against it to rest and to twist up a coil of her wet hair, and as she waited she saw some one come out of the gate a few yards from her and stand looking seawards. She cowered closer to the sheltering wall, for it was Dick, and his young face, on which the lamplight above him fell flickeringly, was full of passionate pain. He gave one look skywards and seawards as if he too based his failing hopes on the lulling of the storm, then he turned and went up the garden walk.

She could hear his step crunching the gravel, so close was she to him, and the gate fell to with a clang behind him. As if to mock him the wind, which had lulled a moment, burst out anew with a wild wail. Dinah crouched under the wall.

“Oh, Dick,” she said, “oh, Dick!”

The rain beat on her unheeded. “You will comfort him,” Venice had said, but what was she that she should comfort him? She crept on, feeling her way by the wall; the storm had once more hidden the hurrying moon and she was lost in the darkness. Dick never knew what love had been near him that night.

In these last days he rarely left his post by Venetia's side. It seemed to soothe her in her restless weakness to have her old playfellow near her; his love gave him a supreme right which they all recognised. When he was not with her he paced a little anteroom to keep from drowsing, or if sleep overpowered him for a moment he woke fitfully and took up his watch again, ashamed that he had been able for a moment to forget it. On that night, when Dinah crept home in the storm, Dick had

persuaded Mrs. Arabin to rest. Venice was no worse ; she had been sleeping most of the evening and they did not disturb her ; she lay in her white dress on the sofa ; the light burned low, and Dick, as he sat at his sad watch, could barely make out Mr. Dundas's huddled figure in the arm-chair. He had refused to quit his post, but he slept, and the storm without and the trouble within were for a little time mercifully forgotten.

Towards midnight the wind fell with an almost eerie suddenness, and, as if she missed its harsh lullaby, Venice awoke.

Dick slipped down on his knees beside her ; some sad instinct told him that the supreme moment had come. He schooled himself fiercely to repress every emotion that he might not lose one last word.

“ You will go back with the padre ;” she put out her hand and touched his bowed

head. "He will be so lonely. You will not leave him, Dick?"

"I will not leave him."

"And some day, if happiness and a better love than mine should come to you, Dick, you will not refuse it? You will remember that day—'It was Venice's wish; it was almost the last thing Venice said to me.' Oh, Dick," she broke off with a sob, "I did so wish to live!"

He put his strong young arms about her as if he would have held her from death if he could; his heart was wrung with her cry, "I did so wish to live! I wanted to see my own bonnie hills again." It was the last natural yearning for life; the last shrinking repulsion from the unknown.

She grew quieter presently, and seemed to wander a little, murmuring happily of their childish days when they were lost

and alone in the world with the stars, but by and by she roused herself with a little start. "I have a message for him," she said; "will you give it, Dick?"

"He is here; I have seen him. Would you like me to bring him to you, Venice?" Dick steadied his lips to speak quietly.

"Ah, no, not here; in another world, perhaps," she whispered. "Lift me up a little, Dick, that I may tell you while there is time."

He raised her gently. And in the strange dead silence, as if the world had hushed its goings that he might listen, he heard Venetia's last message.

XI.

THE great struggles of life—the sorrows that set a man aloof from his fellows, and make his world bare about him, are surely not suffered in vain. A soul that has known a great anguish is for ever solemnised ; it can never again lightly yield itself to trivialities ; the shock that has rent it puts a wide chasm between it and all old ties of habit and thought. The searching anguish colours and determines everything anew. It is in some sort a true death—the death that begins on this side the grave.

Owen Challice knew that he had thus died as he stood looking down on Venetia's

last sleep, and her message coming to him out of the eternal silence, called him to "a new life in the old one's stead." Some glimmer of hope had crossed his black wretchedness; he could not tell to what it might lead; he only knew that he dared no longer be base or ignoble; his sick heart knew its choice at last—his life was no longer his own; it was the debt for which Venetia's life had paid.

He lifted his weary head and schooled himself to look his last at her. She lay in a very peaceful sleep, not sad and forsaken, as he had seen her last, but with a smile on her lips as if she had wakened to some unlooked-for joy. A great heap of flowers lay beside her where Dinah had tossed them down when she rushed away to weep out her full heart. He took one of them and laid it between her still, folded hands.

“It is my answer to your message,” he whispered; “in that other world where you are you will understand.”

A long time afterwards as it seemed, he came out into the sunlight; it was a gay, laughing world now, as if it had never been vexed with storm, and the beleaguered holiday-makers were bathing, promenading, jesting, with a new sense of zest and freedom. Challice passed them by, hardly seeing them, but he struck away instinctively from the thronged footpath and went towards the sea. In the midst of his heart-sickness a dim purpose sustained him; there had been war in the East and there was now the more terrible scourge of pestilence and famine, and the suffering cry of a nation came to him as a call which he must obey. The only possible regeneration lay in action; in such work—the

harder and more distasteful the better—as might fall to him—he saw his one chance of struggling back to peace.

On the shore, far off from the happy crowd, a solitary figure was standing. Dick looked absently into the illimitable distance with saddest sorrow on his young face. Challice hesitated a moment and then he went up to him.

“You and I will meet no more,” he said; “I am going where I shall never cross your path again—would God I had never crossed it before!—where perhaps some day the boon of death will come to me too. Will you make my self-torment a little less bitter by your pardon, Dick?”

Dick looked round slowly, dully, as one in a dream. As his heavy eyes rested on the other's face some vibrating chord of the old frank affection—so long alienated—was touched; perhaps he read there the

signs of a sorrow more tragic than his own.

He tried to speak, but the words choked him ; he put out his hand and the two palms met in a reconciling clasp. Then Challice turned sharply away and took his first step into the new life.

He left Dick standing looking out towards the still, smiling sea—so still, so smiling, though but lately rent with storm. Was it an emblem of young Dick's life—a foreshadowing of the unseen years that were to come ?

THE END.

4.



